



Walking Through Memory: How Community Walking Tours Activate Urban Kampung as a Living Oral Archive

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Abstract. Community walking tours in urban kampung areas have emerged as a significant form of heritage practice in Indonesian cities, bringing together guides, residents, and participants through shared movement across historically layered spaces. Many existing studies tend to position walking tours primarily as tourism products or community-based initiatives, while this paper asks how they activate urban kampung areas a living oral archive. Using qualitative field-observation approach, the study examines three Soerakarta Walking Tour routes: Margoyudan, Laweyan, and Kampung Sewu. Data were collected through direct observation of guide-resident-participant interactions and spatially situated storytelling and analysed to identify the mechanism of narrative activation. The finding shows three mechanism: spatial anchoring, when the objects and architectural details triggers narratives through bodily presence; transfer of narrative authority, in which resident's sharing of living knowledge; and productive interruption, is participants' question and memories which redirect narratives to unexpected aspects of the local past. These explain that the living oral archive isn't a fixed repository of memory but situated and co-produced process of remembering which continuously renewed through embodied encounters among people, places and multiple voices. By conceptualizing walking tours as practices through which cultural memory is actively produced, this study contributes to heritage and oral memory studies.

Keywords: living oral archive, community walking tour, urban kampung, embodied heritage, Surakarta

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, tourism has shifted from a model based on mass consumption to forms of tourism that focus on digitalization, sustainability, cultural and adventure experiences, experiential tourism [1], [2], [3], and spatial storytelling [4], [5]. One example of this trend is the growing popularity of walking tours. Today, walking tours can be found in many cities around the world, including London, Berlin, Beijing, Kyoto, and Lombok, Indonesia. They are no longer only a way to explore a city, but also provide opportunities for emotional engagement between visitors and local cultural landscapes [6], [7], [8], [9], [10].

In Indonesia, this trend is also becoming more visible in major cities. Walking tours are now offered in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Bali, Semarang, and Solo. For example, Jakarta offers colonial heritage tours in Kota Tua, Bandung highlights its Art Deco architecture, Yogyakarta features creative village and culinary tours, and Semarang provides walking tours of Kota Lama through urban storytelling. These examples show how urban tourism is becoming more diverse by combining cultural heritage, local stories, and digital media to engage visitors.

Despite this development, walking tours are frequently referred to a small-scale community tourism product or a type of alternative tourism. This view reflects part of the reality but it ignores an important discussion: the process through which stories are created, negotiated, and continuously renewed as people move through urban spaces. The content of these stories has received more attention than their production. This paper argues that in urban neighbourhoods', the community-led walking tours serve as living oral archives. Through ongoing interactions among guides, local residents, and participants in historically layered spaces, they perform and recreate memory rather than acting as static collectors of memory.

This study is based on direct observation of three routes of the Surakarta Walking Tour: Margoyudan, Laweyan, and Kampung Sewu. These neighbourhoods were selected not because they are officially recognized as heritage sites, but because their lack of formal heritage status makes it possible to observe more natural forms of narrative production without strong branding or institutional influence. All interview and observational data were collected in Indonesian and Javanese. Translations are the author's own. The study identifies three main mechanisms through which oral archives are activated: first, the connection of stories to specific places and physical objects; second, the sharing of narrative authority between guides and participants; and third, productive interruptions, where participants' questions expand and reshape the archive in unexpected ways.

2 Method

2.1. Living Oral Archives: From Preservation to Performance

Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* [11] argues that archives are more than simple collections of the past. Rather, they are systems shaped by institutional power authority and selection. He explains that archives are linked to both origin and

authority through the idea of *arkhe*. Something becomes an archive not just because it exists, but also because some mechanisms dictate what is recognized, kept and understood. His concept of *hypomnesis* further shows that archives are external type of memory produced when human memory is limited. Because of this, archives are constantly in conflict between preserving the past and losing some of its significance. This concept makes it possible to view archives as both records and procedures that maintain the memory alive.

Through his work on oral history, Alessandro Portelli [12] discuss this concept further. He suggests that the real value of oral testimony lies in the meaning that people give to their experiences so oral memory should not be judged only by whether it matches historical facts. Memories that seem like inaccurate can show how communities understand the past and build their collective identity. Some elements such as voice, tone, pauses, and storytelling style are also significance in oral history because they carry knowledge that cannot be fully recorded in written documents.

Diana Taylor [13] extends this idea through her discussion of the repertoire and the archive. The repertoire communicates knowledge through repeated activities, such as storytelling, rituals, gestures, and everyday social practices, whereas the archive maintain knowledge through documents and material objects. Instead of just being written down, the body itself turns into a living memory that perform the past. From this concept, each walking tour can be seen as an example of the repertoire. Cultural memory is recreated through the route taken, the stories recounted, and the interaction between participants and guides. The process of remembering is always renewed rather than merely duplicated because every tour involves unique individuals and interactions.

Using these concepts, this study uses the term *living oral archive* to argue a form of cultural memory which is activated through situated, embodied and relational storytelling rather than preserved as a fixed record. It emerges through movement, encounters with material traces, resident's recollection and also participants interventions. This idea differs from the conventional archives that emphasize preservation and institutional selection; from oral history, which commonly treats spoken testimony as a source through which past experiences are documented and from oral tradition which focuses on the transmission of cultural knowledge across generation.

2.2. Space, Body, and Heritage: From the Production of Space to Relational Memory

According to Henri Lefebvre, space is not a neutral or empty container but rather a social product. Social interactions and human activity create space. He suggest three interrelated dimensions of space: representational space, which is the space people experience and give meaning to in their daily lives; representations of space, which are the ways planners, governments, or institutions imagine and organize space and spatial practice, which refers to the production and use of space in everyday life. These three elements come together In Surakarta's urban neighbourhoods, when walking tour participants' expectations align with the daily experiences of locals. This interaction becomes a process of crafting news stories rather than being neutral.

Michel de Certeau further develops this idea by arguing that walking is an important spatial activity in and of itself. According to him, humans create space by their movements rather than just passing through it. The path chosen for a walking tour influences how stories are experienced and told. It establishes connections between locations, arranges the orders of occurrences and creates a symbolic map that can only be understood through movement. In this way, narrative does not exist before movement; it develops as people walk through the space.

These concepts of embodied heritage are based on the viewpoints of critical heritage studies that discuss heritage is not found only in buildings or historical objects. The ways people move, pause, touch, and respond to places [14] are the examples of heritage. During a walking tour, participants do not simply observe heritage. They experience it by standing in a particular location, touching the surface of an old wall, or sensing the atmosphere around a historic building. This produces a type of knowledge that cannot be entirely replaced by written texts or digital recordings since it is based on first-hand bodily experience.

Relational space is another key idea. Relationships between people and places across generation, and between locals and visitors are what shape a neighbourhood's memories rather than tangible artefacts. According to this viewpoint, the stories shared on a walking tour do not belong to a single person or a single location. Instead, they arise from conversations between guides, residents who shares their own experiences and participants who bring questions and fresh viewpoints. The primary framework of this studies is derived from two theoretical stances: the construction of spaces via bodily movements and the living oral archive expressed through performance.

3 Result and Discussion

Field observations along the Surakarta Walking Tour routes in Margoyudan, Laweyan, and Kampung Sewu identified three recurring mechanisms through which urban neighborhoods function as living oral archives. These mechanisms do not work independently. Instead, they interact and reinforce one another during each tour, although their importance varies depending on the location, the guide, local residents, and the participants.

3.1 Spatial Anchoring: Narratives Connected to Places and Objects

The first mechanism is spatial anchoring, in which oral narratives are closely connected to specific places and physical objects. When guides tell the general historical facts during the fieldwork, the richest stories did not emerge. Rather, they appeared when the group stopped in front of certain objects, such as an antique door, a traditional loom still in use, a family photograph hanging on a wall, or a corner of a house marked by years of everyday life. These objects acted as memory triggers, encouraging stories that would not have emerged without the actual presence of participants on that location.

A clear example of spatial anchoring was observed on the Margoyudan route at GKJ Margoyudan. The church was nominated as a cultural heritage site in 1992 but has never received official heritage status because responsibility for the process

shifted between government institutions. The guide briefly explained this administrative history. However, the most important moment was not the explanation itself but what happened next. While describing changes to the building, the guide pointed to a specific part of the facade, drawing attention to the replacement of the stained glass and to an inscription below the circular window that reads “*Rasa Manunggal Binukeng Gusti*”. Participants, who listened passively, immediately turned to look more carefully at the building. Within a few moments, the building was no longer just an old church; it became something to be interpreted. This change occurred not because new historical information was introduced, but because the guide directed everyone's attention to a particular detail.



Fig 1. Participants observing the facade of GKJ Margoyudan during the walking tour.

The guide then explained that the inscription is a *sengkalan*, a traditional Javanese dating system in which numbers are expressed through meaningful words that must be read in reverse order. In this case, “*Rasa Manunggal Binukeng Gusti*” is not simply a decorative phrase but a coded representation of a particular year. This explanation becomes meaningful only when participants are standing in front of the building and can directly observe the inscription. Without being there, the information would remain an abstract explanation of Javanese culture rather than an experience of discovering hidden meaning in the building itself.

The field photograph (Figure 1) illustrates this arrangement. The guide stands facing the participants with the church behind them, while the participants are positioned so they can follow the guide's gestures toward details on the facade. In contrast to a lecture in classroom, there are no seats or presentation slides. The story only works because everyone is in the same location and time, and the building itself becomes the teaching medium.

Hearing this explanation while standing directly in front of the building creates a different experience from simply reading the information in a document. Participants do not only learn about an unresolved administrative process; they can also see the physical evidence of that uncertainty. The difference between official recognition and actual practice becomes something they experience directly rather than simply understand as information.

This mechanism has important theoretical implications for understanding the archive. If a narrative becomes meaningful only when people are physically present with a particular object, then the archive cannot be separated from its material setting. Unlike written documents, which can be copied and moved, these narratives are fully activated only when people encounter the place itself. This finding supports Smith's (2006) argument that heritage is produced not only by objects but also by people's embodied engagement with them. It also extends that argument by showing that both the object and the body must be present together for the narrative to come alive.

3.2 Transfer of Narrative Authority: From Guide to Residents

The second mechanism is the transfer of narrative authority, in which the role of storyteller shifts from the guide to local residents. In most walking tours, the guide is expected to be the main source of knowledge, deciding what stories are told, in what order, and from which perspective. However, field observations show that some of the most meaningful moments occur when the guide steps back and allows residents to share their own experiences.

This transfer is more than a change of speakers. It represents an epistemic shift from curated knowledge to lived knowledge. Curated knowledge is selected and organized by the guide for visitors, while lived knowledge comes directly from people's everyday experiences of living, working, and maintaining traditions in the neighbourhood. This kind of knowledge is not part of a prepared script and cannot be fully reproduced by anyone who has not experienced it personally.

A clear example of this transfer was observed during a visit to the workshop of a third-generation batik entrepreneur in Laweyan. After giving a brief introduction, the guide said: "This is Mr. Panda (pseudonym). He is well known for his abstract batik designs, very expressive, as people often describe them. We are fortunate that he is here today because he will share some of his stories with us." The guide then simply added, Please, Sir." After these words, the guide stepped back and allowed the entrepreneur to take over the conversation. There was no formal interview, no prepared list of questions, and no attempt to control the discussion. Instead, the guide created space for the resident to speak freely from his own experiences. At that moment, authority over the narrative shifted from the guide as a cultural interpreter to the resident as the primary witness and bearer of local knowledge. This shift transformed the walking tour from a guided presentation into a shared process of knowledge production, where participants encountered stories grounded in personal memory rather than in a prepared historical narrative.

Narsum: Jadi emang, ya istilah kalau, karena kan seng familiar nguri-uri budaya gitu nggih. jadi memang kepinginnya itu nguri-uri budaya, supaya lebih mengena karena jarene cah-cah aku ijjik enom gitu hlo. (peserta tertawa) itu ekspresifnya. Tapi banyak juga pertanyaan dari anak-anak mahasiswa, "Pak kenapa nggak bikin klasik batik Jawa?" Karena kan begini, saya itu kan, dalam tanda kutip mewakili anak-anak muda supaya batik itu nggak melulu motif Jawa. Satu hal yang kita tahu waktu kita di UNESCO itu kan teknisnya, bukan motifnya. Gitu hlo, makanya pinter-pinternya pemerintah kita itu di teknisnya jadi warisan tak berbandanya di teknisnya. Jadi berbanding terbalik manakala motifnya Jawa dengan teknik diprint itu tidak boleh. Apalagi pakai embel-embel nama batik Lurik.

Guide: Baju motif batik

Narsum: Naa, maksimal hanya kain bermotif batik.

Guide: Kain tekstil bermotif Batik

Narsum: Sedangkan kalau dengan gambar apapun dengan menorehkan tinta panas ya dibilang itu batik tulis. Di situ keuntungan kita. Makanya ini menjadi peluang genz yang ingin berekspresi dengan batik, jadi apapun motifnya asalkan dengan begitu tadi ya disebut batik tulis. Kemudian kalau saya ke abstrak tadi karena lebih ke awalnya saya itukan, saya transition karena saya sudah tiga generasi sudah berkecimpung di dunia batik itu, kemudian muncul kontemporer itu pertama di tahun 60 an itu era ne Bapak, kemudian bukan saya menciptakan tapi saya sempurnakan, saya tambah-tambahi, akhirnya bisa masuk di ranah fashion. Bidikan saya awalnya anak-anak muda dulu karena lebih ke warna-warna berani gitu kan ya. Ndak Jawa ndak suka item atau apa, lebih ke warna-warna berani. Tapi lambat laun malah seng tuo-tuo seneng juga. saya ndak berani bilang kalau pecinta batik itu jenuh dengan motif jawa, tapi kita benturannya adalah muncul kearifan lokal itu. Artinya saya ndak berani bilang kalau pecinta Batik ini jenuh dengan motif Jawa, saya ndak berani bilang kesana. Tapi, kita benturannya adalah muncul kearifan lokal itu menjadi sebuah peluang bisnis di, lebih banyak abstrak. Karena orang Kalimantan, orang Sumatra, orang apa disuruh pakai Kawung atau Parang agak-agak gimana gitu nggih. Makanya lebih fleksibel ke abstrak. Takut keliru, kemudian karena terlalu Jawa banget padahal saya identitasnya Kalimantan, saya baca seperti itu, mewakili itu. Maka ini.. ee.. menjadi tren juga di fashion juga, karena mereka lebih fleksibel di tren dalam merancang karena tanpa pakem. Karena pengalaman kemarin saat Kaesang married di Mangkunegaran, orang Kementerian di Jakarta juga mereka keliru mengambil motif juga. Makanya itu kalau dipaksa juga akhirnya di Mangkunegaran disuruh ganti atau disuruh pulang. Karena mereka ini yang penting pakaian bagus gitu ya.

Guide: penting batik (sambil tertawa tipis)

Narsum: Karena yang mereka beli, mereka pakai itu, kebanyakan Kawung kemudian Truntum. Karena bagus, gitu nggih. (peserta sedikit tertawa) Hla sedangkan untuk Parang itu kan pasti nggak boleh. pasti suruh pulang.

Sedangkan Truntum itu untuk besannya. (peserta tertawa, terdengar suara menyaut "iya")

Guide: akehmen besan e (peserta tertawa)

Narsum: akhirnya ya itu, putuskan abstrak saja. yang penting ada motif jawanya. akhirnya larinya kesitu

Speaker: Well, you know, people often say we should *nguri-uri budaya*. Preserve our cultural heritage. That's really what I want to do, to help preserve it. But I also want it to connect with younger people because, as the kids keep telling me, "*Pak, you're still young!*" (participants laugh). That's where my expressive style comes from. But students often ask me, "*Sir, why don't you make traditional Javanese batik?*" My answer is that, in a way, I represent the younger generation. I don't want batik to be limited to traditional Javanese motifs. One important thing we learned from UNESCO is that the recognition is based on the technique, not the motif. That's where our government was smart. They registered the technique as intangible cultural heritage. So, it's actually the opposite of what many people think. If a cloth has a traditional Javanese motif but is printed, then it isn't considered batik at all especially if it's marketed as *batik* or even *batik lurik*.

Guide: A shirt with a batik motif.

Speaker: Exactly. At most, it's just fabric with a batik pattern.

Guide: Textile fabric with a batik motif.

Speaker: Right. But if any design, whatever the image, is made using hot wax applied by hand, then it's *batik tulis*. That's our advantage. It creates opportunities for Gen Z to express themselves through batik. The motif can be anything, as long as it's made using the traditional wax technique, it's still considered *batik tulis*. As for why I work with abstract designs, it's because I've grown up in the batik world. I'm the third generation in my family. Contemporary batik first appeared during my father's generation, around the 1960s. I wouldn't say I invented it, I simply developed it further. I added new ideas until it eventually entered the fashion industry. At first, I targeted young people because they like bold colors. They're not really drawn to dark colors or very traditional Javanese styles. They prefer brighter, more expressive designs. But over time, older people started to like them too. I'm not saying that batik lovers are tired of traditional Javanese motifs. I wouldn't go that far. The real issue is the growing importance of local identities. That creates new business opportunities, especially for abstract batik. Imagine asking someone from Kalimantan or Sumatra to wear *kawung* or *parang* motifs. It can feel a little uncomfortable because those motifs are strongly associated with Javanese identity. That's why abstract designs are more flexible. People don't have to worry about wearing the "wrong" motif or feeling that it's *too Javanese* when their own identity is, for example, Kalimantan. That's how I see it. In a way, my work represents those people. It has also become a trend in fashion because

designers have much more freedom. They don't have to follow strict traditional rules. For example, at Kaesang's wedding reception at Mangkunegaran, several officials from ministries in Jakarta wore the wrong batik motifs. Because of that, some of them were asked either to change their clothes or to leave. They were simply thinking, "*This outfit looks nice.*"

Guide: *Well, at least they were wearing batik. (laughs softly)*

Speaker: Exactly. They bought what they thought looked beautiful. Most of them wore *kawung* or *truntum*. They chose them because they looked attractive. (*participants laugh softly*) But *parang* is definitely not allowed in that context. You'd be asked to leave. And *truntum* is traditionally reserved for the parents-in-law. (*Participants laugh, and someone responds, "That's right."*)

Guide: *Akehmen besane. (Javanese; jokingly, "Only if you've got lots of in-laws!") (participants laugh)*

Speaker: So, in the end, I decided to focus on abstract batik. As long as there's still a Javanese element in it, that's enough. That's the direction I chose.

Mr. Panda shared knowledge that isn't prepared in the guide's script. He began explaining an important legal and technical distinction that challenged many participants' understanding of batik as cultural heritage. According to him, UNESCO recognizes Indonesian batik because of its technique, not because of its motifs. As long as cloth is made using the traditional process of applying hot wax by hand, it can be called *batik tulis*, regardless of whether the design is classical, abstract, or contemporary. In contrast, fabrics printed with traditional motifs such as *Kawung* or *Parang* are not considered batik. As he explained: "It's actually the opposite. Even if the motif is Javanese, if it is printed rather than made with the batik technique, it is not batik." This explanation did more than provide factual information. It challenged the common assumption that the value of batik lies mainly in its traditional motifs and shifted participants' attention to craftsmanship and production techniques.

Mr. Panda then connected this explanation to his own family history. As a third-generation batik maker, he described himself not as the creator of abstract batik but as someone who has continued and refined the work begun by earlier generations. According to him, his father introduced contemporary batik in the 1960s, while he later expanded it into the fashion industry by responding to changing market preferences. Younger consumers were attracted to brighter colors and more expressive designs, and over time these styles also became accepted by older generations. His goal was not to reject Javanese motifs but to make batik more inclusive. He explained that customers from regions such as Kalimantan and Sumatra often felt that motifs like *kawung* and *parang* did not represent their own cultural identity. Abstract designs allowed them to wear batik without feeling tied to a particular regional tradition.

The discussion reached its memorable moment when Mr. Panda shared an incident from the wedding reception of Kaesang at Mangkunegaran. He recalled that several government officials from Jakarta attended the event wearing traditional batik

motifs that were not appropriate for the palace setting. Some wore the *parang* motif, which, according to palace tradition, should only be worn under specific circumstances and by people of certain status. As a result, some guests were asked to leave or change their clothing. With a smile, he explained, "They bought the batik because they liked it. Most chose Kawung or Truntum because they looked beautiful." The audience laughed because they understood the irony. The story highlighted the difference between choosing batik for its visual appeal and understanding the cultural rules that govern when and where certain motifs should be worn. It showed that aesthetic appreciation and cultural knowledge are not always the same, and that misunderstanding these traditions can have real social consequences.

During this discussion, the guide spoke only briefly, making comments such as "Well, at least they were wearing batik." and "Only if you've got lots of in-laws!" These remarks did not add new information or correct the speaker. Instead, they served as expressions of agreement that encouraged the conversation to continue. Throughout this exchange, the guide acted as a facilitator rather than the main storyteller. The knowledge shared during this session including the distinction between technique and motif, the negotiation of regional identity through batik design, and palace dress protocols, was not available in the guide's prepared narrative or in written documents. It emerged only because Mr. Panda was present and willing to share his personal experience with the participants.

This mechanism shows that the oral archive of the neighborhood is distributed rather than centralized. Knowledge is shared among different people rather than controlled by a single authority. This finding supports Portelli's argument [12] that oral history is most valuable when people speak from their own lived experiences instead of simply answering prepared questions. In the context of a walking tour, the most effective guide is therefore not the one who tells the greatest number of stories, but the one who creates opportunities for local residents to become the storytellers themselves.

3.3 Productive Interruption: Participants' Questions as Gateways to the Archive

The third mechanism is productive interruption, in which participants unexpectedly shape the direction of the narrative. Unlike the previous two mechanisms, which focus on the relationship between guides and local residents, this mechanism highlights participants as active contributors to the production of knowledge. Rather than simply receiving information, they bring their own memories, experiences, and perspectives into the tour.

Field observations show that productive interruptions do not always begin with questions asked out of curiosity or lack of knowledge. On the Kampung Sewu route, the group stopped on the bank of the Bengawan Solo River. Looking at the river, the guide explained the traditional *getek tambang*, a river-crossing system made of two boats connected by bamboo and pulled across the river with a rope. While showing an illustration, the guide explained that this method is still used today because operating

the raft requires practical knowledge of river currents and balance that is passed down from one generation to the next.

Peserta: Itu masih banyak mbak?

Guide 2: Masih banyak, itu yang sampai ke Jawa Timur; daerah Ngawi, Bojonegoro itu masih ada.

Peserta: Sukoharjo juga

Guide 2: itu daerah seperti ini..

Peserta: Jamanku SD, nyebrang gini juga tapi kawasan Sukoharjo

Guide 1: oke

Peserta: Kan nggone kulo belakange Bengawan Solo niki, kulo melu bolak-balik.

Guide 1: Menarik sekali pengalaman yang bisa dicoba.

Peserta: Tapi sekarang udah nggak ada. Dulu nggak kapal gini malahan

Guide: Gimana dulu mbak?

Peserta: Cuma bambu, getek

Peserta lain dan Guide: ooo

Guide 1: Cukup beresiko ya berarti dulu.

Peserta: Muter sebelum ada jembatan yang sambungan Wonogiri sama Nguter yang...

Guide 2: Oh ya, yang habis tikungan itu ya (sambil gerak tangan memeragakan belok)

Peserta: Iya, itu dulu kan juga pake e gitu yoan, getek gitu. Cuma bambu, serius

Guide 2: (melihat guide 1) wah deg-degan ya

Peserta: Seru, kalau dulu kan sungainya nggak seperti ini. Wong dulu saya pernah ke sungai Bengawan Solo. Trus dulu itu aktivitas sungai Bengawan Solo itu orang nambang pasir

Guide 1: oo, (Guide 1 dan 2 mengangguk) berarti masih nemu ya, melakukan aktivitas pertambangan itu.

Guide 2: Dulu pakai serok dari bambu itu kan?

Peserta: iya dari bambu. Itu, terus mandiin kerbau di sungai. Soale ak melu mandiin.

Guide 1 dan 2: wuih, punya kerbau (sambil tertawa)

Peserta: Enggak, kan di desa dekat Bengawan Solo jadi aktivitas masyarakat nambang pasir itu, sama batu-batu itu hlo mbak, kerikil. Trus itu nanti, untuk bahan bangunan. Jadi nutuki sepanjang .. jadi aktivitasnya seperti itu, masih seperti itu. Dan air bengawan Solo nya belum sedalam.. pie ya maksude, biasa gitu.

Guide 1: Mungkin kalau dulu lebih bervariasi ya aktivitas di sungai, kalau sekarang paling mentok pol mincing

Participant: Are there still many of those, Miss?

Guide 2: Yes, there are. You'll still find them all the way to East Java, around Ngawi and Bojonegoro.

Participant: They're still used in Sukoharjo too.

Guide 2: Yes, in places like that...

Participant: When I was in elementary school, I crossed the river like this too, in the Sukoharjo area.

Guide 1: Really?

Participant: My house was just behind the Bengawan Solo River, so I used to cross back and forth all the time.

Guide 1: That's a wonderful experience to share.

Participant: But they're gone now. Back then, we didn't even use boats like these.

Guide 1: Oh? What did you use instead?

Participant: Just bamboo rafts—*getek*.

Other participants and Guides: Oh...

Guide 1: That sounds quite risky.

Participant: This was before the bridge connecting Wonogiri and Nguter was built...

Guide 2: Oh yes, the one just after the bend? (*gestures with a turning motion*)

Participant: Exactly. We used *getek* there too. Just bamboo. I'm serious.

Guide 2: (*turning to Guide 1*) That must have been nerve-racking.

Participant: It was fun! The river was completely different back then. I remember the Bengawan Solo when people were still mining sand.

Guide 1: Oh. (*Both guides nod.*) So, sand mining was still an active part of daily life then.

Guide 2: They used those bamboo scoops, didn't they?

Participant: Yes, bamboo scoops. And people also bathed their buffaloes in the river. I used to help with that.

Guides 1 and 2: Wow, you had buffaloes? (*laughing*)

Participant: No, not ours. We lived in a village near the Bengawan Solo, so that was just part of everyday life. People mined sand and gravel—the small stones used for construction. They spent their days along the riverbank breaking the stones by hand. That was simply how life was then. And the Bengawan Solo wasn't as deep as it is now... well, it felt much more ordinary.

Guide 1: Perhaps there used to be many more activities on the river. Now, people mostly come here only for fishing.

The discussion changed when one participant interrupted, not by asking for clarification but by sharing a personal memory: "When I was in elementary school, I also crossed the river like this, but in the Sukoharjo area." This short comment immediately shifted the conversation beyond the guide's planned narrative. The group began discussing simpler bamboo rafts without rope systems, sand and gravel mining along the river using bamboo tools, bathing water buffalo in the Bengawan Solo River, and memories of how much deeper and busier the river had been in the past.

Rather than leading the discussion, the guide mainly responded to these memories, confirming and occasionally expanding them. At one point, the guide commented, "Perhaps there used to be many more activities on the river. Now, people mostly come here only for fishing." This episode reversed the usual pattern of a

walking tour. Instead of the guide opening the archive for participants, the participant opened the archive for the guide. The stories that emerged about everyday river life, local economic activities, and transportation before permanent bridges were built were not part of the guide's prepared narrative. They became available only because someone in the group had personally experienced that period.



Fig 2. Participants discussing the Bengawan Solo River history and local memories. while facing the landscape.

This mechanism shows that the living oral archive is responsive and co-produced. It develops not only through what guides and residents choose to share but also through the questions, memories, and experiences that participants contribute. As a result, every walking tour produces a different narrative. The same pattern appeared in other parts of the fieldwork. On the Margoyudan route, a participant asked, “Can we use the Gregorian calendar?” This unexpected question encouraged the guide to explain the sengkalan system in greater detail, including the differences between the Javanese calendar and the Gregorian calendar, an explanation that had not originally been planned. A similar moment occurred in Laweyan during Mr. Panda's storytelling session. As participants repeatedly laughed at his story about inappropriate batik motifs worn at the Mangkunegaran palace, the guide responded by adding further explanations about the cultural meanings of the *kawung* and *truntum* motifs. These additional details were not part of the original presentation but emerged naturally in response to the audience's reactions.

Together, these examples show that the village's living oral archive is not fixed or predetermined. It is continually shaped by everyone present during the tour. Participants contribute not only questions but also memories, experiences, and associations that guides cannot anticipate. Different groups therefore produce different stories, as each group opens different parts of the archive. The archive can never be fully revealed in a single walking tour. Instead, it remains alive because every encounter creates new possibilities for remembering and retelling the past.

4 Conclusion

The three mechanisms identified in this study: spatial anchoring, the transfer of narrative authority, and productive interruption do not operate separately. In every

walking tour observed, these mechanisms worked together in different ways. Narratives were connected to physical places and objects, authority shifted from the guide to local residents or participants, and unexpected interactions opened new directions for storytelling. Together, these mechanisms suggest that the living oral archive of urban neighbourhoods does not exist as a fixed collection of knowledge. Instead, it comes into being through the act of storytelling itself.

This understanding differs from the conventional idea of the archive. In Derrida's view, archives preserve selected traces of the past by separating them from the original context in which they were produced. The findings of this study suggest the opposite. The narratives observed in Margoyudan, Laweyan, and Kampung Sewu cannot be separated from the places and interactions that produce them. For example, the guide's explanation of the sengkalan at GKJ Margoyudan becomes meaningful only when participants stand in front of the building and follow the guide's gestures toward the inscription. Likewise, Mr. Panda's discussion of batik motifs developed because the guide created space for conversation and participants responded with interest and laughter. The memories shared about traditional bamboo rafts on the Bengawan Solo River also emerged only because participants were standing beside the river itself. Without these physical and social conditions, the stories would not have been told. In this sense, the archive does not exist independently of the moment in which it is performed.

The main theoretical contribution of this study lies in identifying the mechanisms that connect several established perspectives. Critical heritage studies argue that heritage is a process rather than an object. Oral history emphasizes that spoken memories follow a different logic from written documents. Performance studies distinguish between the archive and the repertoire. This study brings these perspectives together by showing how they operate within community walking tours. Spatial anchoring shows that narratives require both physical objects and embodied presence. The transfer of narrative authority demonstrates that the archive is shared among multiple voices rather than controlled by a single authority. Productive interruption shows that the archive is co-created because it is shaped not only by those who tell stories but also by those who participate in the conversation.

This study has two important limitations. First, the findings are based on observations of three Surakarta Walking Tour routes in one city. The results should therefore not be generalized to other places without further research. Second, the living oral archive described here depends on the continued presence of local residents who are willing and able to share their experiences. The long-term sustainability of this archive depends on social and community conditions that were beyond the scope of this study.

These findings also raise new questions about the relationship between living oral archives and digital media. Many walking tour communities now share stories, photographs, and tour documentation through social media and other online platforms, allowing their narratives to reach audiences far beyond those who physically join the tours. This raises several important questions. Does digital circulation simply extend the archive, or does it change its nature by transforming

lived experiences into media content? Do narratives lose important meanings when they are separated from the physical places where they were originally experienced? Or can digital platforms create new forms of the archive that are impossible to experience during a walking tour alone?

This study does not attempt to answer these questions. However, the three mechanisms identified here provide a useful framework for future research. They make it possible to examine more clearly what aspects of a living oral archive can be preserved through digital circulation and what aspects remain dependent on physical presence, face-to-face interaction, and embodied experience.

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