



MULTIDISCIPLINARY IN ACTION

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2025

E-ISSN: 3083-9343





Published By:

**Akademi Tenggara Press,
Akademi Tenggara Enterprise**

On 27th February 2025

<https://shorturl.at/FGiV2>

MULTIDISCIPLINARY IN ACTION

E-ISSN: 3083-9343



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PUBLISHED BY

Akademi Tenggara Press,
A department under Akademi Tenggara Enterprise
admin@akademitenggara.com

This journal is published yearly.

AKADEMI TENGGARA ENTERPRISE

In Collaboration with academics and students of
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)
from the Department of History & Civilisation, for
the course Public History (HIST 2303)

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Volume 1, Issue 1, 2025

E-ISSN: 3083-9343



PREFACE

FROM THE TABLE OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Multidisciplinary in Action Journal, published by Akademi Tenggara Enterprise.

This issue is a result of a collaborative effort with academics and students of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Department of History & Civilisation, for the course Public History (HIST 2303).

It brings together twelve insightful articles that reflect various themes, from cultural identity and public history to educational advancements and political movements. Each piece offers a unique perspective, contributing to the understanding of our shared heritage and contemporary society.

The first article, “Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens”, discusses how the practice of wearing batik among public servants emphasizes cultural pride and national identity. The article highlights how this traditional attire remains relevant within the evolving professional landscape.

The second article, “KLCC Twin Towers Through the Lens of Public History: A National Icon Reflecting Malaysia’s Aspirations and Realities”, examines Malaysia's iconic landmark, reflecting its role as a symbol of national progress and the complexities tied to modernization efforts.

The third piece, “Fall of Barisan Nasional in GE14 and Media Framing: Revisiting the Event through Public History ”, examines one of Malaysia’s key political turning points, exploring the influence of media narratives during this crucial general election.



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PREFACE

FROM THE TABLE OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In the fourth article, “Perceptions on the Establishment of AHAS KIRKHS, IIUM Through the Lens of Public History”, the authors explore the historical and societal impacts of this institution, shedding light on its contributions to Islamic education and intellectual growth. The student union has shaped student representation and contributed to campus dynamics.

The fifth contribution, “Reclaiming the Glory of ISTAC: A Journey Through Public History”, reflects on the historical significance of ISTAC and its role in advancing academic excellence, offering a thoughtful narrative on the institution’s transformation over time.

Following that, the sixth article, “Undi18 Reform: Exploring Youth Participation, Political Literacy, and Media Influence through a Public History Lens”, highlights the impact of the Undi 18 movement, demonstrating the growing political engagement among Malaysia’s younger generation.

In the seventh article, “Public Perception of the Establishment of IIUM Student Union: Relevance, Challenges, and Future Directions”, the authors investigate how the establishment of the student union has shaped student representation and contributed to campus dynamics.

The eighth piece, “Significance and Sustainability of Communiversity at IIUM: A Public History Project”, focuses on how the concept of “*communiversity*” nurtures stronger community ties and highlights the university’s role as a societal partner.

The ninth article, “The Phenomena of Ayam Gepuk: Culinary Assimilation and Identity Through Public History Lens”, narrates the story of this popular dish, emphasizing its cultural significance and how it serves as a reflection of local identity and entrepreneurship.



Volume 1, Issue 1, 2025

E-ISSN: 3083-9343



PREFACE

FROM THE TABLE OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The tenth article, “Evolution of Learning and Malaysian Education Industry Digitization in the Pandemic Era (2020-2024): A Public History Project and Literature Survey” discusses how digital transformation has reshaped the education sector in recent years, with a focus on IIUM’s experiences.

The eleventh contribution, “Evaluating the Impact of COVID-19 on SPM 2020 Candidates: A Comparative Public History Analysis”, explores the pandemic’s impact on education, highlighting the resilience and adaptability shown by students and educators during unprecedented times.

Lastly, the twelfth article, “Visa Challenges at IIUM (2020-2024): Bureaucratic Hurdles and Their Impacts on International Students’ Enrolment”, provides an in-depth account of the administrative challenges faced by international students and their impact on access to education and inclusion.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I extend heartfelt thanks to all contributors and reviewers whose efforts have brought this issue to fruition. We hope these articles will spark meaningful discussions, inspire future research, and serve as a resource for students, academics, and society at large.

Warm regards,
Dr. Lin Sakrawathi
Editor-in-Chief, Multidisciplinary in Action
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MULTIDISCIPLINARY IN ACTION

E-ISSN: 3083-9343



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL TEAM

II

PREFACE

IV



BATIK THURSDAYS: EXPLORING CULTURAL PRESERVATION IN GOVERNMENT WORKPLACES THROUGH A PUBLIC HISTORY LENS

1



KLCC TWIN TOWERS THROUGH THE LENS OF PUBLIC HISTORY: A NATIONAL ICON REFLECTING MALAYSIA'S ASPIRATIONS AND REALITIES

9



FALL OF BARISAN NASIONAL IN GE14 AND MEDIA FRAMING: REVISITING THE EVENT THROUGH PUBLIC HISTORY

19



EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF AHAS KIRKHS ESTABLISHMENT AT IIUM: INSIGHTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC HISTORY

29



RECLAIMING THE GLORY OF ISTAC: A JOURNEY THROUGH PUBLIC HISTORY

38



UNDI18 REFORM: EXPLORING YOUTH PARTICIPATION, POLITICAL LITERACY, AND MEDIA INFLUENCE THROUGH A PUBLIC HISTORY LENS

47

TABLE OF CONTENTS



PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF IIUM STUDENT UNION: RELEVANCE, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

57



SIGNIFICANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNIVERSITY AT IIUM: A PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT

66



THE PHENOMENA OF AYAM GEPUK: CULINARY ASSIMILATION AND IDENTITY THROUGH PUBLIC HISTORY LENS

74



EVOLUTION OF LEARNING AND MALAYSIAN EDUCATION INDUSTRY DIGITIZATION IN THE PANDEMIC ERA (2020-2024): A PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT AND LITERATURE SURVEY

82



EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SPM 2020 CANDIDATES: A COMPARATIVE PUBLIC HISTORY ANALYSIS

93



VISA CHALLENGES AT IIUM (2020-2024): BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES AND THEIR IMPACTS ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ENROLMENT

104



BATIK THURSDAYS:

EXPLORING CULTURAL PRESERVATION IN
GOVERNMENT WORKPLACES THROUGH A PUBLIC
HISTORY LENS



MULTIDISCIPLINARY IN ACTION

Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens

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To cite:

Zulkifly, A. T., Zaharuddin, A. R., Nasir, A., Hasram, H. N., Zaidi, M. M., Murad, N. T. M., & Mohd, S. H. (2025). Batik Thursdays: Exploring cultural preservation in government workplaces through a public history lens. *Multidisciplinary in Action*, 1(1), Akademi Tenggara Press.

Abstract

This public history project examines the implementation and impact of the 'Batik Thursdays' policy, which mandates Malaysian federal government employees to wear batik attire every Thursday. The study looks into the origins of batik in Malaysia, the government's rationale for instituting the policy, and the subsequent economic and cultural ramifications. Using a blend of traditional and public history methodologies, including oral history interviews, archival research, and site surveys, the project offers an in-depth exploration of the challenges and successes associated with this policy. The findings show how important it is to recognize Malaysian batik as different from Indonesian batik, while also emphasizing the policy's role in preserving culture, boosting the economy, and strengthening national identity.

Keywords: *Batik Thursdays, Malaysian batik, Cultural preservation, Economic impact, National identity*

Introduction

This project was conducted as part of the Public History (HIST 2303) course during Semester 2, 2023/2024, under the Department of History and Civilisation, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. The course provided students with the opportunity to apply public history methodologies in a real-world context, contributing to the preservation and promotion of Malaysian cultural heritage.

Batik, an intricate and richly textured fabric that is both dyed and painted with elaborate patterns, has long been celebrated as a cornerstone of cultural heritage in Southeast Asia (Elliott, 2013). This traditional art form, with its origins tracing back centuries, embodies the intricate artistry and craftsmanship of the region's diverse cultures (Phipps, 2011). In Malaysia, batik holds a particularly esteemed place, not merely as a symbol of cultural identity but as a vibrant industry that significantly contributes to the nation's economic fabric (Legino, 2012). In terms of Batik's enduring nature in the Malaysian society, Huang, Rahman, Singh & Effendi (2024) discussed in their paper the historical significance of batik in Malaysia which is intertwined with the country's colonial and post-colonial eras, reflecting the adaptive cultural practices

Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens

Zulkifly, A. T., Zaharuddin, A. R., Nasir, A., Hasram, H. N., Zaidi, M. M., Murad, N. T. M., & Mohd, S. H. (2025). Batik Thursdays: Exploring cultural preservation in government workplaces through a public history lens. *Multidisciplinary in Action*, 1(1), Akademi Tenggara Press.

It is apparent that the art of batik, characterized by its distinctive wax-resist dyeing technique, is deeply embedded in Malaysian cultural traditions and ceremonies, ranging from formal attire to festive garments (Yunus, 2012). As a result, batik has become more than just a traditional textile; it is a living representation of Malaysia's heritage and national pride (Wahed, Amin, Bohari, Pindah & Azmi, 2022).

Recognizing the profound cultural and economic value of batik, the Malaysian government introduced the 'Batik Thursdays' policy as a strategic initiative aimed at both preserving and promoting this traditional art form (Saleh, Azrin, Tukur, & Kasuma, 2024). This policy mandates that all government employees don batik attire every Thursday, thereby creating a regular, visible platform for showcasing Malaysian batik (Ramli, Kahn & Yaacob, 2018). By implementing this policy, the government seeks to invigorate the local batik industry, stimulate economic activity within the sector, and reinforce a sense of national pride among citizens (Ramlan, 2019). Moreover, the policy serves as a conscious effort to distinguish Malaysian batik from similar traditions in neighboring Indonesia, highlighting Malaysia's unique cultural contributions (Syed, Shamsuddin, Drahman, Hasan, Mohd Asri, Nordin & Shaffiar, 2021). This research looks into the historical context of batik in Malaysia, examining how it evolved from a traditional craft into a prominent symbol of national identity. It also explores the implementation of the 'Batik Thursdays' policy, analyzing its objectives and the challenges faced in promoting the policy across government sectors. Through a public history lens, the article draws on a range of research methodologies, including historical analysis, stakeholder interviews, and economic impact assessments, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the policy's effects. By integrating these diverse perspectives, the article aims to shed light on how cultural policies can influence national identity and economic development while contributing to the preservation of traditional practices.

Objectives

The objectives of this project are threefold. First, it seeks to understand the opinions of Malaysian government employees regarding the batik policy. Second, it aims to explore the economic impact of the policy on batik suppliers and entrepreneurs. Finally, it highlights the significance of batik in the contemporary world, particularly in terms of cultural preservation and national identity. This project addresses several key questions:

1. How did batik first arrive and evolve in Malaysia?
2. Why did the government create the batik policy?
3. What are the opinions and reactions of government employees regarding the batik policy?
4. What is the economic impact of the batik policy, and what is the significance of batik in general?
5. What are the main challenges faced in implementing and adhering to the batik policy?

Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens

Zulkifly, A. T., Zaharuddin, A. R., Nasir, A., Hasram, H. N., Zaidi, M. M., Murad, N. T. M., & Mohd, S. H. (2025). Batik Thursdays: Exploring cultural preservation in government workplaces through a public history lens. *Multidisciplinary in Action, 1(1)*, Akademi Tenggara Press.

Problem statement

The implementation of batik as a formal dress code for Malaysian government employees presents several challenges. These include the need to distinguish Malaysian batik from Indonesian batik, the impact of batik printing technology on traditional methods, the effectiveness of government policies, and the economic implications for the batik industry. This project aims to explore these challenges in depth, with the goal of ensuring both cultural preservation and sustainable growth within the batik industry.

Methodology

This public history project employed a rigorous methodological approach, combining both traditional historical research and public history methodologies. The research design included academic research, archival research, site surveys, and oral history interviews (Lyon, Nix & Shrum, 2017). The data collection methods involved conducting oral interviews with key stakeholders, including batik artists, entrepreneurs, government employees, and members of the public. These interviews were recorded using audio and video devices, ensuring accuracy and reliability in data collection. The archival research component involved examining historical documents, government policies, and other relevant records related to batik production and usage in Malaysia. Site surveys were conducted at key locations, including batik factories, shops, and the National Textile Museum, to gain firsthand insights into the batik industry. The data gathered from these various sources were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of key themes and patterns within the data.

Public history methodologies played a crucial role in this project. The researchers employed oral history techniques to capture the personal experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in the batik industry. These oral histories were then cross-referenced with archival documents and other sources to create a comprehensive historical narrative. Additionally, the project involved engaging with the public through site surveys and interviews, ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders were heard and incorporated into the analysis.

Analysis

The analysis of this public history project is based on a detailed examination of the activities conducted by the researchers. These activities included site surveys, interviews with stakeholders, and extensive archival research. The site surveys were instrumental in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the batik industry in Malaysia. For instance, visits to the National Textile Museum and various batik shops, such as those in Sungei Wang Plaza and Batik CHONG, provided insights into the diversity of batik designs and the economic importance of this traditional craft. The interviews conducted with government employees, entrepreneurs, batik artists, and the general public were particularly revealing. The data from these interviews were analyzed thematically to uncover recurring patterns and themes.

Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens

Zulkifly, A. T., Zaharuddin, A. R., Nasir, A., Hasram, H. N., Zaidi, M. M., Murad, N. T. M., & Mohd, S. H. (2025). Batik Thursdays: Exploring cultural preservation in government workplaces through a public history lens. *Multidisciplinary in Action*, 1(1), Akademi Tenggara Press.

The team conducted thorough site visits to significant locations associated with batik production and promotion. At Perpustakaan Kuala Lumpur, they explored the repository of historical documents, which provided valuable insights into the legislative and cultural backdrop of the batik policy. During their visit to The Batik Shop at Sungei Wang Plaza, the researchers observed the commercial dynamics of batik sales, focusing on consumer interest and market trends. At East Coast Batik Sdn Bhd (Batik CHONG), they gained firsthand knowledge of traditional batik craftsmanship, examining the techniques employed and the challenges faced by artisans. Finally, the National Textile Museum's exhibits enriched their understanding of batik's historical evolution and its integral place in Malaysia's cultural tapestry.

The researchers engaged with a diverse group of stakeholders through a series of oral interviews. They spoke with Mrs. Madziah, a batik artist from East Coast Batik, who provided detailed insights into the intricacies of batik creation and shared the artisans' perspectives on the batik policy. Interviews with En. Firdaus Osman and En. Sabri Suhaimi, officers at Perpustakaan Kuala Lumpur, offered administrative viewpoints on how the policy was implemented. Mr. Edison Chia, the Managing Director of The Big Batik Shop, discussed the commercial implications and market reception of the policy. Additionally, Syami, a 31-year-old member of the general Malaysian public, shared her thoughts on wearing batik and the cultural resonance of the policy from a citizen's perspective. These interviews were meticulously recorded, transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis. Patterns emerged highlighting both support and challenges associated with the policy. Notably, while there was widespread agreement on the policy's cultural significance, gaps in understanding—such as distinguishing between Malaysian and Indonesian batik—were evident.

The research looked into historical records to trace the evolution of the batik policy. It was uncovered that in 1968, MP Wan Kadir Ismail suggested the inception of a weekly "batik day," laying the footing for the policy. In 1985, a circular was issued advising civil servants to wear Malaysian-made batik on special occasions, further promoting the traditional attire (ILHAM Gallery, n.d.). The establishment of "Malaysian Batik Day" on December 3rd, 2021, marked a significant cultural milestone in the nation's history Director General of Ministry of Public Service Malaysia (2021). By 2023, a directive was issued mandating that public officials wear Malaysian batik attire every Thursday, solidifying the policy's importance within governmental protocol Director General of Ministry of Public Service Malaysia (2023).

The research also discovered that one significant finding was the confusion among some employees regarding the differences between Malaysian and Indonesian batik, which pointed to a need for greater public education and awareness. The thematic analysis also highlighted the economic impact of the 'Batik Thursdays' policy, revealing that it had led to an increase in sales and job opportunities within the batik industry. The analysis successfully addressed the project's objectives by providing a comprehensive understanding of the batik policy. The historical context and evolution of batik were clarified through archival research, while site surveys and interviews illuminated the policy's impact on cultural preservation, economic aspects, and implementation challenges. The findings on employee reactions and economic effects met the project's goals, revealing both the positive impact and areas needing improvement, such as public education on batik distinctions.

Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens

Zulkifly, A. T., Zaharuddin, A. R., Nasir, A., Hasram, H. N., Zaidi, M. M., Murad, N. T. M., & Mohd, S. H. (2025). Batik Thursdays: Exploring cultural preservation in government workplaces through a public history lens. *Multidisciplinary in Action, 1(1)*, Akademi Tenggara Press.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the project clearly demonstrate the value of public history methodologies in understanding and documenting cultural heritage policies. The site surveys allowed the researchers to observe firsthand the impact of the 'Batik Thursdays' policy on various stakeholders, from government employees to batik entrepreneurs. The archival research provided historical context, helping to trace the evolution of batik in Malaysia and the government's efforts to promote it as a symbol of national identity. One of the most significant outcomes of the project was the identification of the challenges faced by the policy, particularly the need for distinguishing Malaysian batik from Indonesian batik. The researchers' engagement with the public through interviews also highlighted the policy's success in nurturing national pride and supporting the local batik industry. This outcome was particularly evident in the positive feedback from batik entrepreneurs, who reported an increase in sales and greater public appreciation for batik as a result of the policy.

Conclusion

The 'Batik Thursdays' policy represents a significant cultural and economic initiative by the Malaysian government. The activities undertaken by the researchers, including site surveys, interviews, and archival research, have provided a comprehensive understanding of the policy's impact. The findings from this public history project stress the importance of such policies in preserving cultural heritage, promoting national identity, and supporting local industries. While the project has successfully highlighted the policy's positive effects, it also reveals certain gaps and limitations. One notable gap is the lack of widespread awareness and understanding of the cultural distinctions between Malaysian and Indonesian batik, which suggests a need for more robust public education efforts. Additionally, the limited geographical scope of the research, which focused primarily on urban areas, means that the perspectives of rural communities and smaller batik producers may not have been fully captured. This limitation points to the need for future research to include a broader range of voices and locations to gain a more holistic view of the policy's impact. Moreover, the project identified challenges related to the commercialization of batik, where market dynamics sometimes conflict with the traditional values and practices of artisans. Future public history research could explore ways to balance commercial success with cultural preservation, ensuring that the economic benefits of policies like 'Batik Thursdays' do not come at the expense of cultural authenticity.

This project emphasizes the value of public history methodologies in documenting and analyzing historical and cultural initiatives, as well as engaging with the public to ensure these initiatives are effective and meaningful. The 'Batik Thursdays' policy, while successful, also faces challenges that need to be addressed to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness in the years to come. Future public history research should aim to bridge these gaps, expand the scope of inquiry, and continue to advocate for policies that both preserve and celebrate Malaysia's rich cultural heritage.

Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens

Zulkifly, A. T., Zaharuddin, A. R., Nasir, A., Hasram, H. N., Zaidi, M. M., Murad, N. T. M., & Mohd, S. H. (2025). Batik Thursdays: Exploring cultural preservation in government workplaces through a public history lens. *Multidisciplinary in Action*, 1(1), Akademi Tenggara Press.

In conclusion, the 'Batik Thursdays' policy represents a successful effort by the Malaysian government to promote cultural heritage, support local industry, and instill national pride. The policy has not only strengthened the batik industry but also contributed to the preservation of Malaysian cultural identity in a globalized world. This public history project is hoped to have provided valuable insights into the implementation and impact of the policy, demonstrating the importance of public history methodologies in documenting and analyzing cultural heritage initiatives.

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Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens

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