Leveraging on Social Entrepreneurship Process to Safeguard the Cultural Heritage

Joey Law[1], Jeen Wei Ong[1], Kamarulzaman Ab. Aziz[2]

[1] Faculty of Management, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya, Malaysia
[2] Faculty of Business, Multimedia University, Melaka, Malaysia

1181401644@student.mmu.edu.my, lawjoey@live.com (corresponding author)

Abstract. George Town was inscribed with the UNESCO World Heritage Site title on July 7, 2008. This listing has elevated Penang to the international status of multiculturalism. As time goes by, changes in social fabric are inevitable but it is believed that the listing has escalated the gentrification process and poses several threats to both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The objective of this study is to examine the activities of social entrepreneurship through formal and informal organizations with Social Entrepreneurship Orientation (SEO) in George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) alongside with the involvement of external stakeholders. This paper went on to discuss the process and concept of social entrepreneurship through the lenses of Theory of Change (ToC) and the Power-Interest level of the external stakeholders. This conceptual paper aims to better define and examine the role and process of social entrepreneurship with the integration of ToC and Stakeholder Theory (ST). Apart from that, the result of this future research may provide a framework that can be adopt by organizations to solve contemporary social and environmental issues and provide relevant indicators for policy-makers to enhance policies to encourage social entrepreneurship activities. Lastly, this research hopes to raise awareness among stakeholders, especially the younger generation on the importance of safeguarding the cultural heritage and to ensure the uniquity of our cultural heritage are preserve and successfully transmit to the future generations.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship orientation, cultural heritage, theory of change, stakeholder theory, UNESCO world heritage site.

1. Introduction

In 1786, Penang was formed as the first British trading port and become a crossroad of great civilization the moment when British decided to encourage more settlers (Penang Port Commission, 2021). As a result, it triggered a mass emigration of settlers from China and India to Malaya and apart from settling down, the settlers also brought along cultures, knowledge, skills, traditional practices and religions (Penang Port Commission, 2021). The influences from colonization and mass emigration furnished Penang with unique cultural heritage. On 8th July 2008, George Town, the capital of Penang was awarded with the title of UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) for exhibiting unique tangible and intangible cultural heritage (GTWHI, 2020). Cultural heritage, be it tangible or intangible reflects and represents a community's identity. To protect and preserve one's cultural heritage is long sought by the societies (Stenning, 2015). Undeniable, the WHS inscription not only elevated the status of Penang but it also resuscitated and prevent any pre-war buildings being bull-dozed to make way for skyscrapers (Kaur, 2019; Baron, 2017). Sadly, there are also risks attached to the listing – upon the listing, tourism plays a huge role in the Penang's economy and indirectly triggered gentrification in George Town WHS, thereby, causing exodus of residents and ceasing of traditional businesses (Teoh, 2018; Baron, 2017; The National, 2017). While the exodus is taking place, the intangible cultural heritage is being brought along by the residents, traditional traders and craftsmen and the tangible cultural heritage such as the pre-war buildings were turn into hotels, cafes and souvenirs shops to cater for tourism (Beh, 2019; Teoh, 2018). In some plight situation, unsold pre-war buildings are left to rot because it is too costly and too many guidelines to fulfil during the maintenance process – based on an official information release in 2020 by Penang Island City Council (MBPP), there are reportedly 73 abandoned units in George Town WHS (Lo, 2020).

Unfortunately, safeguarding of cultural heritage is an area which is less likely to secure enough funding from both the government and private sectors, compare to other contemporary social issues such as unemployment, poverty, human rights violations, climate change and so forth that required immediate attention and funding. Factually, the governments are supposed to provide funding to safeguard the cultural heritage but today, governments are slapped with shrinking public budgets (Borneo Today, 2019; Cheng et al., 2013). In year 2018, the National Heritage Department (Jabatan Warisan Negara) which in charge of conservation of pre-war buildings and heritage sites across Malaysia has demanded for more fund as the one-time fund given in 2006 has dried up (Nambiar, 2018). Fortunately, the national budget of 2020 allocated RM10 million to sustain the cultural heritage throughout Malaysia (Borneo Today, 2019). However, during the global pandemic of Covid-19, the tourism sector was hit badly during Movement Control Order (MCO), therefore, the national budget of 2021 focuses more on boosting the tourism industry and repairing of tourism facilities throughout Malaysia (The Malaysian Reserve, 2020; Malay Mail, 2020).

This has resulted the governments to start relying on private markets to achieve their plans but there are just so much the for-profits and non-profits can do (Rhoden, 2014). To safeguard the cultural heritage, specifically the pre-war buildings, the amount of fund given by the government are insufficient as the conservation and renovation process can cost up to three times compared to normal buildings (Edge Prop, 2017). One way to overcome this social issue is through the mechanism of social entrepreneurship. For instance, there are few world-renowned social enterprises that are established to solve social issues such as the Grameen Bank which provide small loans without requiring any collateral to the impoverished, specifically to women to set up small businesses hoping to tackle poverty in Bangladesh and Aravind Eye Hospital in India which uses cash-flow from paying patients to treat and provide services for the poor (Aravind, 2022; Islam et al., 2011). On the other hand, social entrepreneurship activities in Hong Kong had proved the effectiveness in safeguarding both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage through the revitalization project of the Old Tai-O Police Station into a heritage hotel which operates as a social enterprise and residents are given employment opportunities to work in the heritage hotel (HKHCK, 2020; Urban Discovery, 2020). The role of social entrepreneurship is expected to contribute positively in the efforts of safeguarding the cultural heritage in George Town WHS as it is proven that activities of social entrepreneurship are able to solve contemporary social and/or environmental issues (Gregory et al., 2001). Hence, in order to have a long-term positive effect such as reducing the number of abandoned pre-war buildings, increase the number of revitalization projects and to ensure traditional businesses and crafts are being kept alive, the mechanism of social entrepreneurship is needed (Dickel et al., 2020; Dacin et al., 2010).

Hence, this paper seeks to study the process of social entrepreneurship with the following research objectives which is to investigate the role of social entrepreneurship and external stakeholders in the efforts of safeguarding the cultural heritage in George Town WHS. Lastly, in order to have a good grasp on the process of social entrepreneurship, this paper is going to review the underlying theories of Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship Orientation, Stakeholder Theory and Theory of Change in the following section.

2. Literature Review

As discussed above, the social entrepreneurship mechanism is used to solve contemporary social issues, by that, this paper aims to explore the process of social entrepreneurship in the effort to safeguard the cultural heritage in George Town WHS. First of all, the framework to study the process of social entrepreneurship is based on two main underlying theories which are Stakeholder Theory and Theory of Change. However, theories such as Social Entrepreneurship and Social Entrepreneurship

Orientation will too be discussed as they help to create a research boundary when it comes to selection of organizations to be involved in this research.

2.1. Social entrepreneurship

Despite being study across multiple disciplines and practice worldwide – the term social entrepreneurship remains elusive and there is no one unify paradigm to pin it down and it continue to challenge the traditional perspectives of business and economic (Dickel et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Bacq and Janssen, 2011; Roberts, 2005). Till this very day, there are no specific proven method, set of guidelines, core business model or code of practices to describe or address social entrepreneurship (Dickel et al., 2020; Weller and Ran, 2020; Dacin et al., 2010). Scholars from different fields define the term differently so that it fit best within the particular school of thought. Hence, the process of social entrepreneurship is best known as the initiative to combine multiple business strategies to address and bridge the gap of any social and environmental needs that left unmet by the governments and private sectors (MaGIC, 2021; Howard Kucher, 2012). Profitability is still a goal in the views of social enterprises but it is not the only and main goal – the main goal still lies in solving the selected societal issues.

Despite the ambiguity, the Malaysia Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC), a government agency, defined social enterprise as a legally registered business entity in Malaysia that are proactively creating positive impacts to either socially or environmentally and at the same time being financially sustainable (MaGIC, 2021). Apart from legally defining the term, MaGIC has also listed out the three main categories for a business to fit under the social enterprise categories which are businesses must have a clear social goal, to have a business model which generate more than 50% of the total revenue and the goal must be helping a specific beneficiary group, for instance, the disabled community, B40 community (households that earn less than RM4850 monthly), refugees and so suchlike (MaGIC, 2021). However, social enterprise is not one of the legal business entities in Malaysia – this meaning, not everyone can legally register a social enterprise, instead it has to be accredited by MaGIC and up to date there are only 22 accredited social enterprises (MaGIC, 2021; Bursa Malaysia, 2020; Taylor, 2020).

2.2. Social entrepreneurship orientation

Even though there is a lack of legal structure for social enterprises in Malaysia, it does not stop businesses to practice social entrepreneurship activities. There are about 20,000 businesses that practice social entrepreneurship activities in Malaysia; unfortunately, there is no exact data on the business nature and whatsoever available (Loh, 2020). Therefore, the Social Entrepreneurship Orientation (SEO) comes into discussion to include businesses that lean towards the social entrepreneurship spectrum or possess the characteristics of social entrepreneurship and at the same time actively contributing to the society by creating positive impacts, regardless of

the legal business entities (Halberstadt and Spiegler, 2018; Kraus et al., 2017). Entrepreneurship orientation is widely known as the basic critical criterion in identifying, exploring and seeking opportunities which in return creates values and encapsulate the entrepreneurial tendencies for the organizations (Halberstadt and Spiegler, 2018; Kraus et al., 2017). The concept of entrepreneurship orientation (EO) has evolved over the year due to the increase of social entrepreneurship activities. Kraus et al. (2017) were the first delivered scale to operationalize SEO. There are four scales (or dimensions) under the SEO which are social proactiveness where organizations proactively exploiting opportunities to address any societal issues, followed by social risk-taking which is when organizations are willing to take risks to solve social issue even when the end goal might be unclear, social innovativeness is where organizations are innovatively experimenting and combining ideas and inspirations to create positive social impacts and lastly socialness describe the degree which organizations are focusing on creating social value rather than maximising shareholders' wealth. Hence, social entrepreneurship activities can be carried out by all kind of organizations – be it for-profits, non-profits or governmental agencies, so long the profits are being channel to solve societal issues.

2.3. Stakeholders theory

Previously, SEO was discussed to include organizations that practice social entrepreneurship activities in this research. The same goes to Stakeholders Theory (ST), to safeguard the cultural heritage in George Town WHS is a collective process and effort, therefore, organizations cannot do that individually (Wang et al., 2019; De Buck et al., 2017). Plus, from the cultural heritage point of view, the involvement of external stakeholders is vital in ensuring an effective communication process and some stakeholders are viewed as the bearers of the intangible cultural heritage – without them the manifestation and transmission process of intangible cultural heritage may be distorted and incomplete (Lopez, 2014).

Freeman (1984) defined stakeholders as someone who is directly or indirectly affected by or affecting an organization's decision-making process; stakeholders can be divided into internal and external. Later on, Clarkson (1995) further categorize stakeholders into primary and secondary as the boundaries of internal and external stakeholders are unclear. Primary stakeholders are those who participation will directly affect an organization, regardless if they fall under the internal or external category. Still, Freeman (2017) argued that boundaries on stakeholders are to be drawn and solely decide by organization. The categorization process is depending on the purpose of the organization and to what issue organizations are trying to solve (Freeman, 2018). As illustrated in Figure 1, stakeholders can be categorized into four different groups which are Key Players, Keep Satisfied, Keep Informed and Minimal Effort. This matrix enables better categorization of stakeholders based on the level of power and interest and determines whether to participate or engage stakeholders in

the decision-making process (Johnson et al., 2008). Organizations can make better decisions when categorizing and involving stakeholders during the process of safeguarding the cultural heritage of George Town WHS. Besides, previous studies show that the involvement of external stakeholders is vital in the social entrepreneurship process (Wang et al., 2019; De Buck et al., 2017).
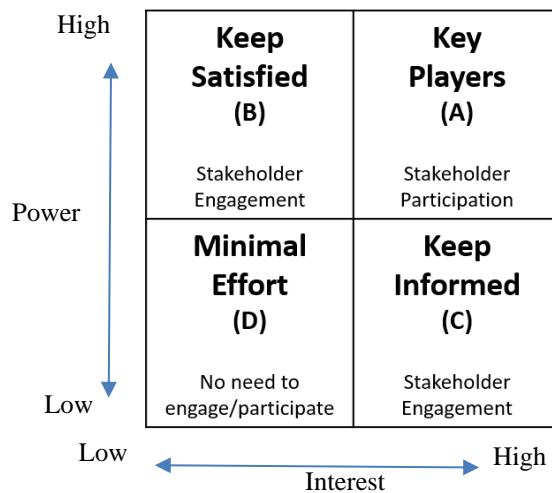

Fig. 1: The power-interest matrix.
Source: Johnson et al., 2008

2.4. Theory of change

After the categorization and knowing which group of stakeholders hold the highest level of power and interest, the process of social entrepreneurship started. In order to study the process of social entrepreneurship, ToC will be used as the underlying theory. In the literature, there are no general agreement on how to define a ToC or a specific set of methodology to employ ToC (Davies, 2018; Stein and Valters, 2012; Vogel, 2012). Stein and Valters (2012) broadly summarized ToC into "if…then" statements, for instance, IF various group of stakeholders are to be involve in the process of safeguarding the cultural heritage, THEN the level of awareness on the importance of cultural heritage will increase. On the other hand, authors such as Ruff (2021), Bacq (2017) and Rhoden (2014) narrowly described and defined ToC – linking ToC to positive social change. In a nutshell, a ToC is a flexible, systematic and cumulative model to study the relationships (or links) between activities, outcomes and contexts of an initiative that required planning and critical thinking (Vogel, 2012). Even though the model of ToC is very flexible, there are certain key elements that should be taken into consideration when plotting a ToC: -

1) The expected outcome(s): Before plotting of a ToC, organizations should have an expected outcome in mind and work backward from there.

2) The resources: Tangible and intangible resources to meet the expected outcomes.

3) The activities: Activities that turn resources into outputs.

4) The outputs: Outputs can be tangible and intangible – usually outputs should be quantifiable.

5) The outcomes: Outcomes can be divided into short and long-term, 1 to 3 years and 4 to 6 years, respectively. Positive repercussions from the outputs are expected.

6) The impacts: Impacts from outcomes might take a little longer time which range from 7 to 10 years.

7) Assumptions: ToC is mapped out based on a series of assumptions and interpretations, for that reason, making them a basic yet crucial element in ToC.

8) Context: The conditions of the social, political and environmental where projects will be carried out.

Therefore, ToC is a helpful model guiding organizations in developing solutions to solve complex social problems (ISIP, 2021; Vogel, 2012).

3. Conceptual Framework

Even though, there are no specific methods to plot a ToC, this study suggests that the element of expected outcome(s) to be the starting point, where organization determine which type of social or environmental issues they are set to solve and the categorization of stakeholders based on their power-interest level towards the organization to be included in the framework and to be place 2nd in the process. Then, it should be followed by the elements of resources, activities, output(s), outcome(s) and lastly output(s) to complete the process. However, it is crucial that set of assumptions and the context are taken into consideration when mapping out the ToC – assumptions can be amended along the way to better fit into the context. As a result, illustrated in Figure 2, a conceptual framework was created to study the process of social entrepreneurship in the efforts to safeguard the cultural heritage in the context of George Town WHS.
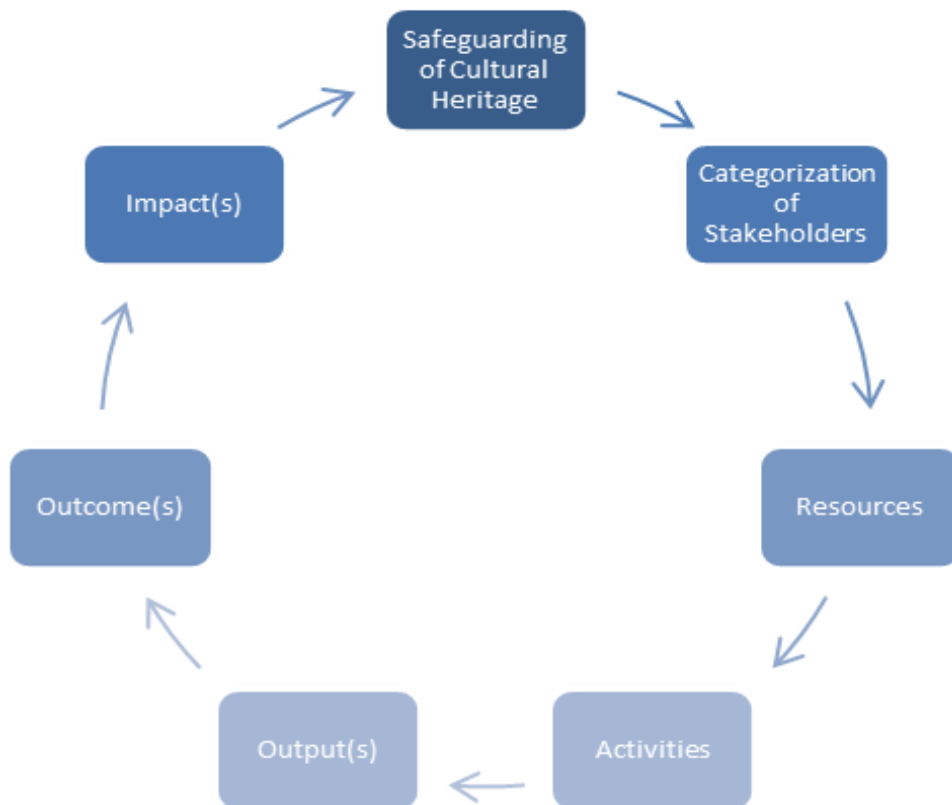
Fig. 2: Proposed conceptual framework.

4. Research Proposition

Based on the above proposed conceptual framework, a set of assumptions are developed – from there, two research propositions are created. Firstly, it is arguable that the process of social entrepreneurship is able to solve contemporary social and/or environmental issues, including safeguarding the cultural heritage in George Town WHS (Betts et al., 2018; Robinson, 2006). Secondly, given the complex phenomenon of George Town WHS, the model of ToC with the integration of ST to categorize external stakeholders will ensure organizations to have a better insight of the changes in social fabric and to understand further what is to be achieve which eventually led to the durability of outcomes (Bacq, 2017; Lopez, 2014; Light, 2009).

5. Methodology

Given the complexity and multifaceted phenomenon of social entrepreneurship, this research will adopt case study method to yield a richer explanation and descriptions on the social entrepreneurship process (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). According to Zucker (2009) and Flyvbjerg (2006), case study method is often used to collect

multiple forms of data – qualitative and quantitative – to gain a deeper understanding of the case. Therefore, in this research, closed-ended questions survey will be used to categorize and study the role of stakeholder while open-ended questions are to study the role and process of social entrepreneurship.

6. Implications

This study consists of four implications which are the anticipation of social entrepreneurship as a new mechanism to bridge the unmet gap in the effort of safeguarding the cultural heritage and that the very same mechanism can be used in other UNESCO WHS within Malaysia to safeguard the cultural heritage and indirectly to slow down the changes in social fabrics. As a too fast of a change in the social fabrics are viewed as a major social issue and often leave negative impacts in a long-run (Longley, 2021; Raheel, 2017). Apart from that, the involvement of various stakeholders in George Town WHS in the safeguarding process will increase the awareness level on the importance of cultural heritage – at least the stakeholders know that there are people and organizations out there that care about the existence of their unique cultural heritage. Thirdly, the social entrepreneurship process acts as an enabler in generation of long-term income by continuous exploring new opportunities and ideas, which in return support the effort to safeguard the cultural heritage. Lastly, the final findings can serve as an input for both the government and policy-makers to enhance the policies to encourage social entrepreneurship activities and to set up a legal structure for social enterprises.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper attempts to contribute a small part in the field of social entrepreneurship, especially on the process of social entrepreneurship in contributing positively in the safeguarding of cultural heritage in George Town WHS. The best evidence available at this time suggests that social entrepreneurship is able to bridge the unmet gaps left by governments and for-profits. Therefore, with the integration of ToC and ST, it helps to strengthens the entire process in safeguarding the cultural heritage. As for future research, in order to generalize the proposed framework, organizations with traits of SEO and aim to safeguard the cultural heritage from various UNESCO WHS should be study. Lastly, once generalization is reach, this framework can be adapted by other organizations that aims to safeguard the cultural heritage, upon and taking into consideration of local characteristics.

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