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CULTURAL EXPRESSION IN THE PUBLIC SPACE OF ISLAND FISHING VILLAGES

A COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS OF SECONDARY EVIDENCE

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Abstract

Public space is the physical and symbolic core through which island fishing communities express, transmit, and renegotiate their culture. Unlike inland or urban public space, the public space of island fishing villages is shaped simultaneously by maritime geography, kinship-based social organisation, religious belief, and the rhythm of fishing production, producing a distinctive layering of practical, symbolic, and communicative functions. This paper synthesises secondary evidence from ten recent case studies and one review of island and coastal fishing settlements in China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Japan, read through theories of public space, cultural landscape, gender and everyday practice, and staged authenticity. Thematic coding identifies five recurring characteristics: (1) sea-oriented spatial orientation and a "circle-layer" settlement structure; (2) the fusion of sacred, productive, and everyday functions in a small number of multi-purpose nodes; (3) the codification of maritime memory into landscape "genes"; (4) gendered, kinship-based, and informal patterns of space use; and (5) the accelerating re-scripting of these spaces under tourism and heritage-commodification pressure. Eight tables and three figures organise the cases, extend a landscape-gene framework with a vulnerability dimension, map which characteristics each source documents, and set out a three-stage model of re-scripting from working space to ritual space to staged display. The paper argues that density of meaning and fragility are two sides of the same spatial economy, proposes six testable propositions, and concludes that cultural expressiveness is best protected by sustaining the productive and ritual practices that continuously regenerate meaning rather than by freezing form.

Keywords: island fishing village; public space; cultural landscape; cultural expression; maritime heritage; landscape gene; staged authenticity.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and problem

Public space is conventionally theorised, following Habermas's account of the bourgeois public sphere, as a site of open discourse and civic exchange (Habermas, 1989). In rural and maritime settings, however, public space performs a wider bundle of roles. It is simultaneously a workspace (net-mending yards, drying grounds, fish-auction platforms), a sacred space (temples, shrines, shore altars to sea deities), a social space (meeting halls, banyan-tree squares, wharfs), and a narrative space in which the community's relationship to the sea is continuously rehearsed and displayed to residents, kin, and visitors alike (Ahmadin & Amiruddin, 2018; Zhou, Xia, & Wu, 2024). What counts as "public" in such settings is therefore not defined by the absence of ownership or by formal designation, but by shared access, shared obligation, and shared meaning.

This breadth matters for how culture is understood and protected. If public space is read only as leisure or civic space, the working beach and the ritual forecourt fall outside the analytical frame; if it is read only as heritage, everyday uses that leave a light physical footprint go unrecorded. Recent scholarship on traditional villages has begun to close this gap by treating public space as an accumulated cultural landscape rather than as neutral geometry (Zhang, Mohd Ariffin, Abdul Aziz, Wang, & Zhang, 2024), but the specific case of the island fishing village

has received uneven and dispersed attention.

1.2 Why island fishing villages are distinctive

Island fishing villages present a particularly concentrated version of this phenomenon. Bounded by water, dependent on a single or narrow range of subsistence activities, and historically isolated from mainland administrative and commercial centres, island fishing settlements have tended to develop compact, multi-functional public spaces whose cultural content is unusually dense. A single wharf-front square may function at once as a market, a ritual site, a meeting hall, and a stage for festivals tied to the tidal and fishing calendar (Taum & Baryadi, 2024; Asriana, Muljana, & Kurniawan, 2026). The sea itself may be understood as part of the community's public realm, as the study of the Lamalera fishing community on Lembata Island suggests when it treats the sea as a cultural space bound up with livelihood, belief, and ritual practice (Taum & Baryadi, 2024).

At the same time, these spaces are under significant pressure from out-migration, coastal engineering, and, increasingly, cultural tourism, which reshapes how maritime culture is expressed and consumed in public space (He, Wang, Lee, & Tsai, 2024). The pressures are not uniform. Some villages are being repositioned as cultural tourism destinations through deliberate community-building strategies, as in the Japanese fishing village of Ine (Pongtanee & Choibamroong, 2025b). Others face the alienation of traditional street interfaces and the hollowing out of the resident community as cultural and tourism industries expand, as reported for Limin Village in Ningbo (Zhou & Gao, 2025). Because island villages have little buildable land, a change in one node has consequences across the whole settlement.

1.3 Research gap

Three gaps motivate this paper. First, the literature is fragmented by region and discipline: Indonesian studies of communal halls and everyday urbanism, Chinese studies of landscape genes and settlement structure, and tourism-management studies of commodification rarely cite one another. Second, most case studies describe a single settlement, so the recurring characteristics that would allow comparison and generalisation remain implicit. Third, the literature seldom links the form of public space to the practices that produce it, so that protection debates oscillate between preserving buildings and staging customs without a clear account of how the two are related.

1.4 Aim and research questions

This paper asks what the recurring characteristics are through which island fishing-village public space expresses local culture, and how these characteristics are documented in recent secondary literature. Rather than presenting new fieldwork, it synthesises secondary data (peer-reviewed case studies, indexed conference proceedings, and academic records published mainly between 2018 and 2026) into a comparative and thematic account supported by summary tables and diagrams. Four research questions guide the synthesis:

RQ1.What recurring spatial and functional characteristics allow public space in island fishing villages to express local culture?

RQ2.Through which elements and spatial carriers is maritime culture encoded and transmitted?

RQ3.Who produces this cultural expression, and through which everyday practices?

RQ4.How do tourism and heritage branding re-script these spaces, and what does this imply for authenticity and protection?

1.5 Contribution and structure

The paper makes four contributions. It consolidates dispersed case evidence into five recurring characteristics. It extends the landscape-gene framework of Zhou et al. (2024) with a vulnerability dimension that identifies which genes are most exposed under tourism. It offers a three-stage model of re-scripting that distinguishes working, ritual, and staged use of the same physical space. And it derives six propositions for testing in primary fieldwork. Section 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature and sets out the analytical framework. Section 3 explains the secondary-data method. Section 4 presents the findings by theme. Section 5 presents the comparative tables. Section 6 discusses theoretical and practical implications and limitations, and Section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Public space: from the public sphere to everyday use

The Habermasian public sphere, in which private persons come together as a public to debate common affairs, has been an enduring reference point, but it has also been criticised for assuming a single, open, and gender-neutral arena (Habermas, 1989; Fraser, 1990). Fraser (1990) argued that actually existing publics are plural and stratified, and that subordinated groups form their own counter-publics. This critique is particularly relevant to fishing villages, where men's and women's use of space is organised by different tasks and different territories. Design-oriented accounts add that public space should be judged not only by access but by whether it is responsive to its users and meaningful to them (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992), and Low and Smith (2006) emphasise that public space is politically produced and contested rather than simply given. Oldenburg's (1989) notion of "third places", informal gathering spaces distinct from home and work, helps explain the social role of wharfs and banyan-tree squares, although in fishing villages the third place is often inseparable from the workplace.

Lefebvre's (1991) triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space is especially useful here because it separates the practice of space (net mending on a wharf), its planned representation (a tourism master plan), and its symbolic meaning (a shrine to a sea deity). Lynch's (1960) vocabulary of paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks provides a descriptive language for the morphology of settlements, and it is implicit in the "node" and "ring" terminology used by the case studies reviewed below.

2.2 Cultural landscape and the landscape-gene framework

Cultural landscape research holds that human activity shapes material landscapes through cultural practice (Sauer, 1925). Tuan (1977) explains how undifferentiated space becomes place through lived experience, and Ingold's (2000) dwelling perspective emphasises that landscape is known through skilled practice, the "taskscape" of activities carried out within it. For island fishing villages these ideas suggest that a drying ground is culturally meaningful not only as a physical surface but as the location of repeated, skilled, seasonal work.

Within Chinese scholarship, the "cultural landscape gene" concept, associated with Liu (2011), decomposes a settlement's cultural landscape into transmissible traits. The framework distinguishes dominant (visible, morphological) genes from recessive (intangible, meaning-bearing) genes that can be catalogued, mapped, and evaluated systematically (Liu, 2011; Zhou et al., 2024). Its value for this paper is that it treats public space as a bundle of separable traits (building form, ritual calendar, place name, worship object), each of which can persist, mutate, or disappear independently as a village changes. A recent review of public cultural space in traditional villages confirms the shift from purely morphological readings to cultural-heritage readings (Zhang et al., 2024).

2.3 The island fishing-village form

Recent Chinese case studies describe a "circle-layer" (圈层) settlement pattern radiating outward from the shoreline: an inner ring of dwellings and ancestral halls, a middle ring of production-support space, and an outer ring facing the sea where wharfs, breakwaters, and shrines to sea deities are located (Zhang, Ma, Qian, Mao, & Lin, 2024). Movement between the rings follows the daily and seasonal rhythm of fishing, so the same route can carry different meanings at different times. This concentric logic explains why individual nodes so rarely correspond to a single civic category such as "square" or "market." In Holimombo Jaya Village on Buton Island, the Galampa communal hall is fixed east of the mosque, mediates disputes, and hosts economic exchange, so that its layout, orientation, and rules of use carry sacred and lineage-linked meaning that a generic open space would not (Ahmadin & Amiruddin, 2018). The Lamalera study extends the notion of public space seaward by describing three cultural domains (mental facts, social facts, and artefacts) and by documenting community rules and taboos on whale hunting that govern conduct at sea (Taum & Baryadi, 2024).

2.4 Gender, everyday practice, and informal production of space

A second strand complicates the assumption that island fishing-village public space is produced by formal design. Several studies emphasise that such space is strongly gendered and largely self-organised through daily labour. Women's work (net mending, fish drying, oyster shelling, intertidal gleaning) often occupies informal, overlapping space adjacent to the home, while men's public space is organised around the wharf, the boat, and the open sea (He et al., 2024, on Xunpu Village's "Zanhuawei" women's culture; a related case study of the Brondong fishing community in Lamongan similarly frames open-space provision as inseparable from fisherwomen's socio-economic roles). Massey's (1994) argument that space and place are themselves gendered constructs offers a general basis for this observation. Because such patterning arises from the organisation of labour rather than from zoning, it is legible to residents yet largely invisible in conventional land-use maps.

A recent study of Pulau Pasaran, an island fishing settlement in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia, extends the point through the concept of "everyday urbanism": public space there is defined less by formal planning than by relational, multifunctional, and adaptive uses of scarce space that residents continuously improvise, so that a drying rack becomes a meeting point, a narrow lane a workshop, and a doorstep a market stall (Asriana et al., 2026). Read together, these strands caution against evaluating fishing-village public space through formal heritage categories such as "monument" or "designated square" alone.

2.5 Tourism, commodification, and authenticity

A third strand documents how public space is re-scripted by tourism and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) branding, which layers a representational function on top of productive and ritual ones. UNESCO's (2003) convention gives international standing to intangible practices, and this recognition is one of the routes through which local customs become tourism products. Classic theory explains why the outcome is contested. MacCannell (1973) argued that tourists seek access to "back regions" while operators supply staged fronts; Cohen (1988) countered that authenticity is negotiable and can emerge over time; Urry (1990) described a socially organised tourist gaze; and Cohen and Cohen (2012) distinguished "cool" authentication, based on expert verification, from "hot" authentication, based on ritual and collective affirmation. Butler's (1980) life-cycle model adds a temporal dimension: pressures on public space shift as a destination moves from exploration to consolidation.

Recent empirical work gives these debates a fishing-village content. In Xunpu Village, Fujian, the Zanhuawei floral-headdress custom has been repositioned as a photogenic attraction, turning streets, temple courtyards, and the former beach-working zone into a stage for commercial photography (He et al., 2024). In Tanka Fishing Village, Lingshui, social-network-driven "spatial commercialization" has moved from a predominantly fisheries economy to a fusion of fisheries and tourism and then to an integration of fisheries, tourism, and culture, shaped by governments, businesses, village committees, Tanka residents, and tourists (Cheng et al., 2025). In Koh Perd, Thailand, old houses were the cultural resource most highly valued by interviewed tourists as authentic and aesthetic, yet they primarily serve commercial purposes (Pongtanee & Choibamroong, 2025a). Studies of Swedish harbour tourism add that visitors value visible fishing vessels, while local stakeholders are divided on whether an active fishery is essential, echoing the distinction between real and virtual fishing communities (Brookfield, Gray, & Hatchard, 2005; Waldo, Blomquist, Sundström, & Waldo, 2023).

2.6 Synthesis and analytical framework

Table 1 summarises the theoretical lenses used in this paper and how each is applied. Figure 1 integrates them: maritime geography, kinship and belief, and fishing rhythm generate the first four characteristics of public space, while tourism and coastal engineering introduce re-scripting. The result is a continuum between production-based expression (lived, practised, seasonal) and representation-based expression (staged, branded, standardised), with feedback from display to everyday use.

Table 1. Theoretical lenses and their application to island fishing-village public space

Lens	Key sources	Core idea	Application in this paper
Public sphere and its critique	Habermas (1989); Fraser (1990)	Public space as arena of discourse; plural, stratified publics	Why men's and women's spaces differ and why some publics are invisible
Meaningful, contested public space	Carr et al. (1992); Low & Smith (2006); Oldenburg (1989)	Space judged by responsiveness, politics, and informal gathering	Reading wharfs and squares as social and political, not only functional
Production of space	Lefebvre (1991)	Perceived, conceived, lived space	Separating practice, planning, and symbolic meaning at a single node
Cultural landscape and place	Sauer (1925); Tuan (1977); Ingold (2000)	Landscape as cultural record; place through lived, skilled practice	Treating drying grounds and wharfs as taskscapes
Landscape gene	Liu (2011); Zhou et al. (2024)	Dominant and recessive transmissible traits	Inventory of cultural carriers (Table 6)
Gender and everyday space	Massey (1994); Asriana et al. (2026); He et al. (2024)	Space as gendered; everyday urbanism	Explaining informal, self-organised space use
Authenticity and staging	MacCannell (1973); Cohen (1988); Cohen & Cohen (2012); Urry (1990)	Staged fronts; negotiated and hot authenticity	Interpreting re-scripting under tourism

Note. Sources are the works cited in Section 2.

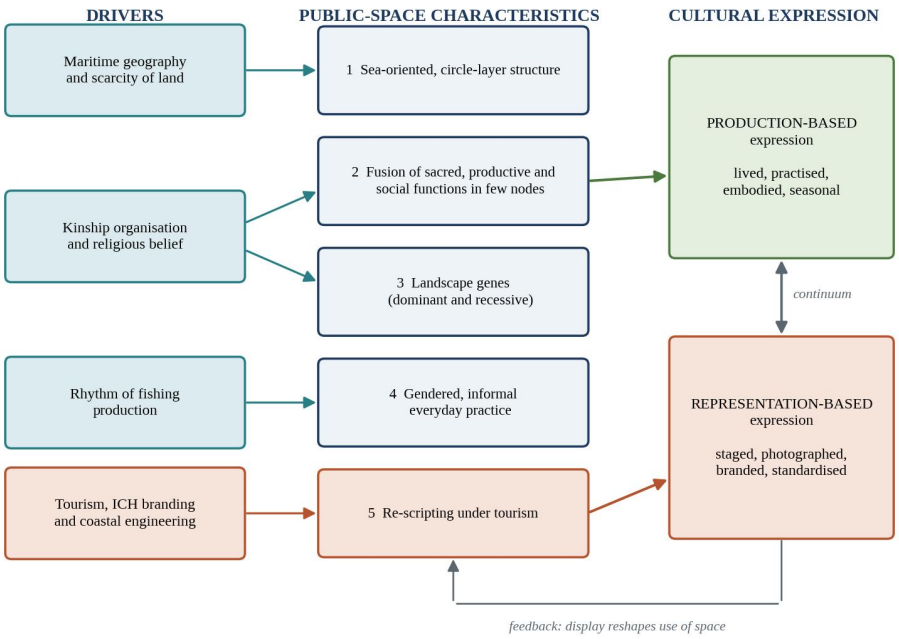


Figure 1. Analytical framework: drivers, public-space characteristics, and the continuum from production-based to representation-based cultural expression.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a secondary-data, qualitative comparative-case method. The unit of

analysis is the published case study of an island or coastal fishing settlement, and the aim is analytic rather than statistical generalisation: to identify characteristics that recur across otherwise unrelated cases and to specify how each is documented. A synthesis design was chosen because the topic is dispersed across regions and disciplines and because primary fieldwork in several countries was beyond the scope of the study.

3.2 Source identification and selection

Sources were purposively selected from peer-reviewed journals (Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering, Sustainability, Habitat International, Tourism and Hospitality, International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, Journal of Architectural Design and Urbanism, Parichart Journal), indexed conference proceedings (Atlantis Press ICSS 2018), and an academic journal record documenting an island fishing village in Zhoushan, China. Table 2 lists the screening criteria. The resulting corpus comprises ten case-based sources and one review article, drawn from China (five cases), Indonesia (three), Japan (one), and Thailand (one). Comparative and theoretical works from Sections 2.1 to 2.5 were used to interpret, not to expand, the case corpus.

Table 2. Screening criteria for the case corpus

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Setting	Explicit focus on an island or coastal fishing settlement	Purely inland villages; large port cities
Subject	Empirical or field-based treatment of public, open, communal, street, or shore space, or of a village-wide cultural landscape	Studies of fishery economics or stock management without spatial or cultural content
Period	Published or indexed within the last decade, with priority to 2023–2026	Older items unless needed as a foundational case
Evidence	Field survey, interview, mapping, or documented ethnographic description	Promotional or purely journalistic accounts
Access	Full text or substantive abstract available for coding	Sources for which content could not be verified

3.3 Analytical procedure

Data extracted from each source (setting, type of space, methods, principal findings, and stated pressures) were coded thematically in two passes. A first, deductive pass applied three categories drawn from the literature: sea-oriented structure and functional fusion, landscape-gene elements, and gendered or tourism-driven use. A second, inductive pass split the last category into gendered everyday practice and tourism-driven re-scripting because the evidence for the two proved distinct, yielding five characteristics. Table 3 gives the resulting codebook. Cases were then compared in a matrix (Table 7) recording whether each characteristic was documented, partly documented, or not reported.

Table 3. Codebook used for thematic coding

Theme	Operational definition	Example indicators in sources
C1 Sea-oriented structure	Settlement or public-space organisation oriented to the shoreline or sea	Concentric rings; wharf, breakwater, and shrine at the seaward edge
C2 Functional fusion	One node serving ritual, productive, and social functions at once	Communal hall as forum and market; temple forecourt as gathering place
C3 Landscape-gene encoding	Cultural content tied to identifiable carriers that can be inventoried	Information points; worship sites; place names; architectural types
C4 Gendered, informal practice	Space use patterned by gender, kinship, or improvised everyday use	Women's intertidal labour; drying rack used as meeting point
C5 Tourism re-scripting	Change in use or meaning of space due to tourism, ICH branding, or commercialisation	Photography stage; interface alienation; commercial use of old houses

3.4 Trustworthiness and limits of the method

Three limits should be stated. First, secondary synthesis inherits the framing, sampling, and quality of the original studies; sources vary from journal articles to a conference paper, a preprint, and an academic journal record, and the latter two carry less evidentiary weight. Second, a source that does not report a characteristic has not shown that it is absent, so the matrix in Table 7 records the focus of the literature and not the presence or absence of features in villages. Third, the corpus is small and purposive, and it is weighted toward China and Indonesia. Findings are therefore presented as recurring patterns and propositions for testing, not as established generalisations.

4. Findings: Cultural Expression Characteristics of Public Space in Island Fishing Villages

4.1 Sea-oriented spatial structure

Across the reviewed cases, the most consistent characteristic is that public space in island fishing villages is organised around, and oriented toward, the sea rather than toward an inland civic centre. The circle-layer model documented for Wushi Village on Taohua Island, Zhoushan (Zhang et al., 2024), shows how successive rings of space (dwelling, production support, and shoreline) each carry distinct cultural content, from ancestral and domestic ritual in the inner ring to sea-worship and departure and return rituals in the outer ring (Figure 2).

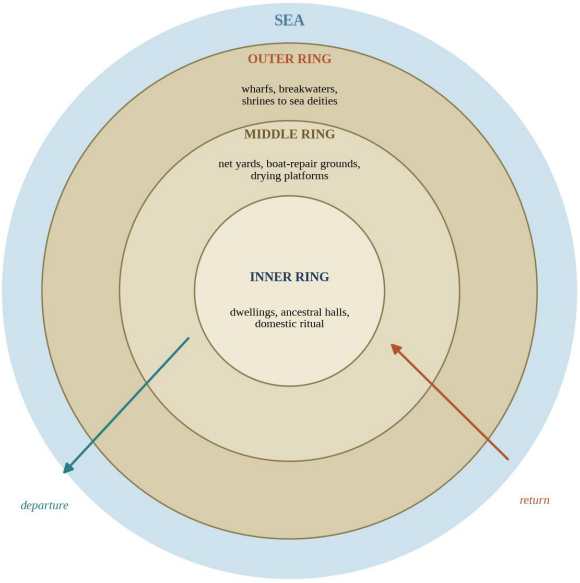


Figure 2. Schematic circle-layer structure of an island fishing village, based on the description in Zhang et al. (2024); an idealised diagram, not a survey map.

This concentric orientation is not merely descriptive geography. It means that a resident's daily movement through public space is itself a repeated enactment of the community's relationship to the sea, moving from the sheltered, kin-defined inner rings toward the exposed, productive, and hazardous outer edge and back again. In Lynch's (1960) terms, the shoreline is the dominant edge and the wharf the principal node, but here the edge is also a threshold between the human and the maritime world. The Dongmen study is consistent with this reading: its coastline and fisheries production scene lie along the edge of the island, as one of the categories of the village environment (Zhou et al., 2024). Lamalera goes furthest, treating the sea and shoreline as a cultural space in which livelihood, belief, and ritual are inseparable (Taum & Baryadi, 2024). The implication is that an analysis limited to the built-up area will systematically miss the outer ring where much cultural expression is concentrated.

4.2 Functional fusion and the density of meaning

Layered onto this spatial structure is a second, equally consistent pattern: a single public space frequently serves multiple, and sometimes theoretically incompatible, functions at once, rather than being assigned one designated use as in a conventional urban plan. The Galampa hall

in Holimombo Jaya Village is simultaneously a meeting hall, an economic forum, and a space carrying "sacred values" tied to its fixed position east of the mosque (Ahmadin & Amiruddin, 2018). Mazu temples and their forecourts in Chinese coastal fishing villages likewise function as belief centres and social gathering points, and increasingly as staged backdrops for commercial photography (He et al., 2024). In Pulau Pasaran the same fusion is produced informally, at the scale of the doorstep and the lane (Asriana et al., 2026).

This fusion appears to be a direct consequence of scarcity, since island fishing villages typically have little buildable flat land, but it also concentrates cultural meaning. Because so few nodes exist, each is asked to carry ritual, economic, and social significance simultaneously, making public space read as unusually dense with cultural content relative to its physical size. The same density has a corollary examined in Section 6.1: a node that carries many functions is exposed to the loss of any one of them.

4.3 Landscape-gene encoding of maritime culture

The Dongmen Fishing Village study operationalises this fusion by constructing a "cultural landscape gene information chain" that identifies four major cultural categories (fishery-industry culture, folk-belief culture, maritime-defence culture, and island-settlement culture) subdivided into 14 subcategories and 29 discrete information points, ranging from boat-building techniques to worship rituals to defensive architecture (Zhou et al., 2024). This coding scheme is significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that the cultural content of island fishing-village public space is not random but falls into a small number of recurring, classifiable domains. The same four broad categories (production, belief, defence, and settlement) are visible, in different proportions, in the Buton, Zhoushan, Xiangshan, and Lembata cases reviewed above. Second, because each information point is tied to a specific physical or spatial carrier (a shrine, a drying ground, a watchtower, a place name), the framework offers planners a replicable method for auditing which cultural genes a given public space still expresses and which have already been lost.

A wharf that retains its productive function but has lost its associated ritual practice would register as "dominant-only," its recessive, meaning-bearing gene effectively extinct (Table 6). This distinction is important because the two kinds of gene are lost at different speeds and are noticed by different audiences. A visitor can see a wharf; only a resident can tell that the launching ceremony is no longer held. The Koh Perd and Limin studies suggest the mirror-image case, in which the dominant gene (old houses, traditional street interfaces) survives physically while its original function is commercialised or the community that animated it declines (Pongtanee & Choibamroong, 2025a; Zhou & Gao, 2025). The landscape-gene framework thus also functions as a diagnostic of how a space has been transformed.

4.4 Gendered everyday practice

A fourth characteristic concerns who produces this cultural expression. Public space use is strongly patterned by gender and by informal, adaptive practice rather than by formal design. In Xunpu Village, women's Zanhuawei custom and associated intertidal labour historically organised much of the village's public and semi-public space (He et al., 2024). In Pulau Pasaran, public space is produced through everyday, relational, and multifunctional practices rather than top-down planning, with residents "repurposing every inch of space for social or economic use" (Asriana et al., 2026). A large share of the cultural expressiveness documented in Sections 4.1 to 4.3 is therefore continuously re-created by ordinary residents rather than fixed by original design.

Two consequences follow. First, in Fraser's (1990) sense, women's working spaces function as a parallel public that is legible to insiders but rarely mapped, so planning based on formal land-use categories will under-represent it. Second, gendered practice is also a resource for tourism, as the Xunpu case shows, where a women's custom becomes the visual signature of the village. This makes gendered space both the most distinctive and one of the most exposed forms of cultural expression.

4.5 Tourism-driven re-scripting

On the other hand, the same responsiveness makes these spaces highly susceptible to re-scripting once tourism enters. Several recent cases document a shift from production-based to representation-based cultural expression, as ICH branding and social-media-driven tourism convert working spaces (beaches, temple courtyards, residential lanes) into staged, photogenic

settings, sometimes producing standardisation or a partial loss of authenticity (He et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2025). The evidence does not describe a single path, but the cases can be arranged as three stages (Table 4 and Figure 3). At Stage 1 a space is used mainly for work and communal life. At Stage 2 ritual and communal uses continue but are overlaid by visitor attention, as in Mazu forecourts used as photography backdrops. At Stage 3 the space is organised chiefly for display, as when costumed customs are performed for photography and the working beach zone is displaced.

Table 4. Three-stage model of re-scripting of public space under tourism

Stage	Spatial signature	Mode of expression	Illustrative evidence
1. Working / communal space	Space organised by tide, task, and kinship; light physical footprint	Production-based; embodied and seasonal	Communal hall as forum and market (Ahmadin & Amiruddin, 2018); improvised everyday space (Asriana et al., 2026)
2. Ritual space with visitor overlay	Ritual and communal uses persist; visitors and commerce added	Mixed; hot authentication at risk of standardisation	Mazu forecourts as belief centres and photo backdrops (He et al., 2024); stakeholder debate on active fishing (Waldo et al., 2023)
3. Staged heritage display	Space organised for viewing; production function displaced	Representation-based; branded and standardised	Beach-working zone converted to photography stage (He et al., 2024); alienated interfaces and hollowing out (Zhou & Gao, 2025)

The staged pattern is not confined to China. The Ine case shows a village adopting a deliberate concept of tourism-oriented community-building around its traditional waterfront boat-houses (Pongtanee & Choibamroong, 2025b), and Koh Perd shows that the resource tourists value most may be the one most fully commercialised (Pongtanee & Choibamroong, 2025a). Because the same informal, adaptive character that allows residents to keep reinventing public space for their own purposes also allows outside commercial actors to repurpose it for tourism, gendered everyday practice and tourism-driven commodification should be read as two faces of the same underlying flexibility rather than as unrelated trends.

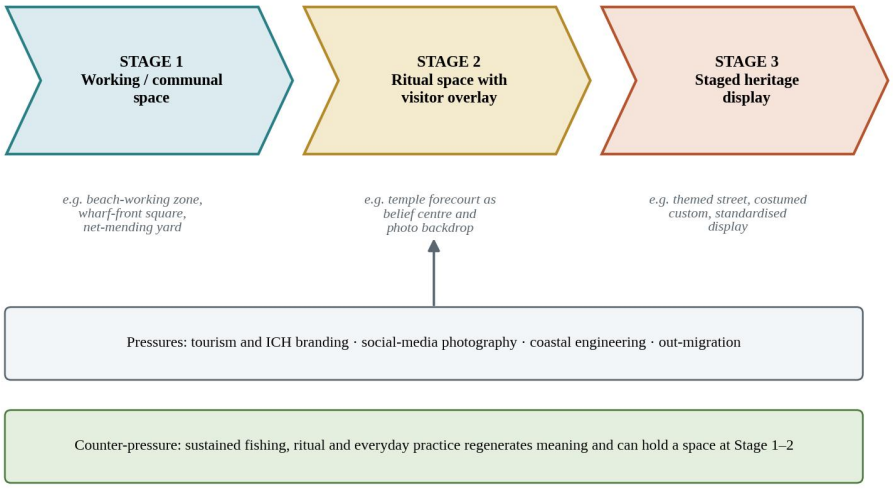


Figure 3. Three-stage model of re-scripting of public space, with pressures and the counter-pressure of sustained practice.

4.6 Cross-case patterns

Three cross-cutting patterns emerge. First, the characteristics are cumulative rather than alternative: functional fusion and landscape-gene encoding are documented together in several cases (for example Holimombo Jaya, Xunpu, and Lamalera in Table 7), which is consistent with both arising from scarcity and from the concentration of belief in a few places. Second, the sources cluster by discipline: architecture and planning studies emphasise structure and genes (C1 and C3), anthropological and community

studies emphasise fusion and everyday practice (C2 and C4), and tourism and governance studies emphasise re-scripting (C5). Third, no single source documents all five characteristics, which is the main reason a synthesis is needed. Section 5 makes this pattern explicit.

5. Comparative Tables

Table 5 summarises the case evidence reviewed for this study. Table 6 presents a landscape-gene framework, adapted from Zhou, Xia, and Wu (2024) and extended with a vulnerability column, for classifying the cultural-expression elements found in island fishing-village public space. Table 7 maps which of the five characteristics each source documents.

Table 5. Comparative overview of public space and cultural expression in selected island and coastal fishing-village case studies.

Case (location)	Type of public space studied	Dominant cultural-expression characteristic	Key source
Holimombo Jaya Village, Buton Island, Indonesia	Galampa communal hall	Sacred, fixed-place public space fusing social, economic, and religious functions	Ahmadin & Amiruddin (2018)
Wushi Village, Taohua Island, Zhoushan, China	Settlement-wide "circle-layer" spatial structure	Concentric zoning of dwelling, production, and shoreline-ritual space shaped by oceanic radiation	Zhang, Ma, Qian, Mao, & Lin (2024)
Dongmen Fishing Village, Xiangshan, Zhejiang, China	Village-wide cultural landscape	Landscape-gene information chain: fishery, folk-belief, maritime-defence, and settlement culture	Zhou, Xia, & Wu (2024)
Xunpu Village, Quanzhou, Fujian, China	Streets, Mazu temple courtyard, former beach-working zone	Sacred and productive space converted into a tourism and photography stage via Zanhuawei ICH branding	He, Wang, Lee, & Tsai (2024)
Tanka Fishing Village, Lingshui, Hainan, China	Village public and commercial space	Social-network-driven spatial commercialisation of traditional fishing-village space	Cheng et al. (2025)
Pulau Pasaran, Bandar Lampung, Indonesia	Kampung open and public space	Relational, multifunctional, adaptive "everyday urbanism" rather than formally designed space	Asriana, Muljana, & Kurniawan (2026)
Lamalera, Lembata Island, Indonesia	The sea and shoreline as cultural space	Sea as an extended, sacred public space bound up with whale-hunting ritual, taboo, and oral tradition	Taum & Baryadi (2024)
Limin Village, Ningbo, China	Village street spaces and interfaces	Historic hierarchical street network; alienation of traditional interfaces and community hollowing under tourism	Zhou & Gao (2025)
Ine, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan	Waterfront boat-house village as cultural tourism resource	Tourism-oriented community-building (Kankou Machizukuri) around traditional fishing heritage	Pongtanee & Choibamroong (2025b)
Koh Perd, Chanthaburi, Thailand	Old houses and fishing-village cultural resources	Old houses valued by tourists as authentic and aesthetic, yet used primarily for commerce	Pongtanee & Choibamroong (2025a)

Note. Types of space and characteristics are paraphrased from the cited sources. Ine, Koh Perd, and Limin are coastal rather than strictly island cases and are treated as supporting evidence on re-scripting.

Table 6. A landscape-gene framework for cultural expression in island fishing-village public space (adapted from Zhou, Xia, & Wu, 2024), with a vulnerability dimension added by this study

Cultural category	Illustrative subcategories	Typical carriers	Mode of expression	Vulnerability under tourism (this study's synthesis)
Fishery-industry culture	Boat-building; net-making and mending; catch processing and drying; fish markets	Wharfs, drying grounds, boatyards, market platforms	Productive practice visible in shared space; embodied skill and seasonal rhythm	High where production declines; space survives as display (dominant-only)
Folk-belief culture	Sea-deity worship (e.g. Mazu); ancestor veneration; ritual calendars and festivals	Temples, shrines, ancestral halls, shore altars	Ritual performance; symbolic ornamentation; processions through public routes	High for recessive elements: calendars and rituals rescheduled for visitors
Maritime-defence culture	Watchtowers; fortified walls; historical anti-piracy infrastructure	Defensive walls, lookout points, gates	Layered historical memory embedded in durable structures	Lower physical risk; interpretation may be simplified for display
Island-settlement culture	Dwelling clustering; circle-layer zoning; place names; kinship-based land use	Residential lanes, communal halls (e.g. Galampa), courtyards	Everyday sociality and lineage identity expressed through spatial organisation	High: interface alienation and community hollowing (Zhou & Gao, 2025)

Table 7 maps the five characteristics against the ten cases. Filled circles indicate that the source documents the characteristic directly, open circles that it is partly or indirectly documented, and dashes that it is not reported in the source. Because sources differ in aim, the dashes reflect the focus of the literature, not the absence of the feature.

Table 7. Cross-case matrix of documented characteristics

Case (source)	C1 Sea-oriented structure	C2 Functional fusion	C3 Landscape genes	C4 Gendered / informal	C5 Tourism re-scripting
Holimombo Jaya (Ahmadin & Amiruddin, 2018)	–	●	○	–	–
Wushi Village (Zhang et al., 2024)	●	○	–	–	–
Dongmen (Zhou et al., 2024)	○	–	●	–	–
Xunpu (He et al., 2024)	–	●	○	●	●
Tanka Fishing Village (Cheng et al., 2025)	–	–	–	–	●
Pulau Pasaran (Asriana et al., 2026)	–	●	–	●	–
Lamalera (Taum & Baryadi, 2024)	○	○	○	–	○
Limin Village (Zhou & Gao, 2025)	–	○	○	–	●
Ine (Pongtanee & Choibamroong, 2025b)	–	–	○	–	●
Koh Perd (Pongtanee & Choibamroong, 2025a)	–	–	○	–	●

Note. ● documented; ○ partly or indirectly documented; – not reported in the source. Coding is the author's interpretation of each source's stated focus.

The matrix shows that C5 (tourism re-scripting) is the most widely documented characteristic (six of ten cases at least partly), whereas C4 (gendered and informal practice) rests on only two cases and C1 (sea-oriented structure) on one direct and two indirect cases. This asymmetry is itself a finding: the most consequential pressure is the best documented, while two of the characteristics that define what is being lost are documented thinly.

6. Discussion

6.1 Density and fragility: the spatial economy of meaning

The comparative evidence indicates that the cultural expressiveness of island fishing-village public space rests less on any single monumental feature than on the layering and co-location of functions within a small footprint of shared space. This layering is efficient, because one wharf-front square can carry ritual, productive, and social meaning simultaneously, but it is also fragile. When one function is withdrawn, for example when beach-based oyster farming is displaced by coastal engineering as documented in Xunpu Village, the space often does not simply become empty; it is re-purposed for a different, sometimes shallower, form of cultural display, such as staged photography (He et al., 2024). We describe this as a spatial economy of meaning in which scarcity of land produces co-location, co-location produces density of meaning, and density makes each node a single point of failure. The idea supports Asriana et al.'s (2026) argument that public space should be understood as continuously produced through everyday practice and not as a fixed heritage artefact preserved in one historical state.

6.2 Practice over form

The landscape-gene framework in Table 6 gives planners and researchers a way to inventory these functions before intervention, but the case evidence cautions that over-formalising or musealising spaces, freezing them as heritage displays rather than sustaining the underlying productive and ritual practices, risks the same authenticity erosion observed in tourism-driven cases (He et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2025). In Ingold's (2000) terms, what is at stake is the taskscape and not only the landscape. The Swedish harbour evidence is instructive on this point, because tourists valued visible fishing vessels while stakeholders disagreed on whether an active fishery was needed (Waldo et al., 2023). That study concerns a mainland harbour, so it is supporting rather than core evidence here, but it illustrates that the virtual fishing village is a genuine option for destinations and a genuine risk for cultural continuity (Brookfield et al., 2005). Sustaining cultural expression therefore appears to depend on preserving the practices (fishing, worship, gendered labour, informal sociality) that continuously regenerate spatial meaning, rather than preserving form alone.

6.3 Dominant and recessive genes as a diagnostic

The distinction between dominant and recessive genes allows two failure modes to be told apart. In a dominant-only space, the physical form and productive use survive but the ritual, calendar, and memory that gave it meaning have gone; the wharf without the launching ceremony is the example given in Section 4.3. In a form-only space, the physical form survives but the function and community have gone, as suggested by the hollowing reported at Limin and the commercial use of old houses at Koh Perd (Zhou & Gao, 2025; Pongtanee & Choibamroong, 2025a). The remedies differ. Dominant-only spaces call for the revival or documentation of ritual practice; form-only spaces call for re-anchoring uses and residents in the fabric. Applying a single "preserve the building" policy to both would be ineffective in the first case and insufficient in the second.

6.4 Gender, visibility, and planning

The gendered character of fishing-village space has a direct planning implication. Because women's work spaces are informal, overlapping, and adjacent to the home, they rarely appear in land-use plans or heritage registers, which is precisely the pattern that Fraser's (1990) critique of a single public sphere would predict. When tourism arrives, the visible signs of women's culture (headdresses, costumes, crafts) are readily commodified while the spaces of their labour are displaced, as in the Xunpu beach-working zone (He et al., 2024). Participatory mapping that includes women's use of space is therefore not an optional refinement but a condition for an accurate inventory.

6.5 Re-scripting, authenticity, and hot authentication

The three-stage model shows that re-scripting is a matter of degree. Staged use is not inevitably corrosive: Cohen (1988) and Cohen and Cohen (2012) suggest that customs adopted and affirmed by the community can acquire emergent or "hot" authenticity even when performed for visitors. What distinguishes Stage 2 from Stage 3 is, we suggest, whether ritual and productive practice continue for their own sake alongside the display. Where they do, the display can co-exist with authentic practice; where production and ritual have gone, display substitutes for them. MacCannell's (1973) back-region logic also helps explain why the beach-working zone, precisely the space most valued as authentic by visitors, is the one most easily converted into a stage once it becomes a destination.

6.6 Propositions for future testing

The synthesis suggests six propositions. These are hypotheses arising from the reviewed evidence and not established findings, and each should be tested in primary fieldwork.

1.**P1 (structure).** The more strongly a settlement is organised as concentric rings oriented to the shoreline, the more everyday movement functions as a repeated enactment of the community's relation to the sea.

2.**P2 (density–fragility).** The greater the number of functions co-located in a node, the greater the loss of meaning when any single function is withdrawn.

3.**P3 (gene loss).** Under tourism pressure, recessive genes (rituals, calendars, memories) are lost before dominant genes (buildings, wharfs), producing dominant-only spaces.

4.**P4 (visibility).** Gendered informal spaces that are absent from formal plans are more likely to be displaced without documentation than formally designated spaces.

5.**P5 (staging).** Where fishing and ritual practice remain active, display coexists with them (Stage 2); where they have ceased, display replaces them (Stage 3).

6.**P6 (practice).** Protection measures that sustain practice (access, calendars, livelihoods) retain cultural expressiveness better than measures that fix form.

6.7 Practical implications

Table 8 translates the findings into planning implications. The instruments are suggestions derived from the synthesis and would need adaptation to local governance. The multi-actor character of spatial commercialisation documented at Tanka Fishing Village (Cheng et al., 2025) implies that such measures depend on governance arrangements that include fishers, women, village committees, and visitors, and not on planners alone.

Table 8. Findings, planning implications, and possible instruments

Finding	Planning implication	Possible instruments
C1 Sea-oriented, ring structure	Protect radial continuity between dwelling, production, and shoreline rings; avoid engineering that severs the outer ring	Shoreline access easements; design codes for revetments and breakwaters; protected launching and landing points
C2 Functional fusion	Treat multi-use nodes as cultural infrastructure; avoid single-use re-zoning; schedule visitor use around ritual and tidal calendars	Multi-use zoning categories; visitor time-windows; limits on commercial photography in ritual courtyards
C3 Landscape genes	Inventory dominant and recessive genes before intervention; distinguish dominant-only from form-only spaces	Landscape-gene audit (Table 6); community-led documentation of rituals and place names
C4 Gendered, informal practice	Recognise informal work and social spaces in plans and registers	Participatory mapping with women; recognition of informal use in land-use plans
C5 Tourism re-scripting	Keep display linked to living practice; return benefits to practising households	Community-controlled interpretation; revenue-sharing; sourcing rules that tie visitor services to local fishing

6.8 Limitations

Beyond the general limits of secondary synthesis noted in Section 3.4, three limitations deserve emphasis. The corpus is small and geographically concentrated, so the characteristics may not hold in other fishing cultures, such as those of the Mediterranean, Pacific, or Atlantic.

The evidentiary weight of the sources is uneven, and two of the sources (a preprint and an academic journal record) should be replaced or corroborated by peer-reviewed studies as these appear. Finally, the vulnerability column of Table 6 and the three-stage model are interpretive constructs by the author and have not been tested against primary data. The research agenda that follows from these limitations is to combine landscape-gene coding with primary fieldwork, to test P1 to P6 across islands at different stages of tourism development (Butler, 1980), to use longitudinal mapping of shoreline and node change, and to include the perspectives of women, younger residents, and visitors.

7. Conclusion

Island fishing-village public space is a compact, multi-functional, and sea-oriented cultural medium in which sacred, productive, and social meanings are densely co-located. Secondary evidence from Indonesia, coastal China, Japan, and Thailand converges on five shared characteristics: a circle-layer spatial structure radiating from the shoreline; the fusion of ritual and productive function within single nodes such as communal halls and temple courtyards; a codifiable set of landscape genes spanning fishery, belief, defence, and settlement culture; strongly gendered and informally negotiated patterns of everyday use; and an accelerating trend toward tourism-driven re-scripting of these spaces.

The paper adds to this synthesis an extended landscape-gene framework that identifies where cultural loss is most likely, a three-stage model that separates working, ritual, and staged use of the same space, and six propositions linking density, gene loss, visibility, and practice. Its central argument is that the density that makes these spaces culturally expressive also makes them fragile, and that protection is therefore best directed at the practices that regenerate meaning rather than at form alone. Future research combining the landscape-gene coding approach with primary fieldwork in additional island contexts would help test the generalisability of these patterns and inform more culturally sensitive approaches to public-space renewal in fishing communities undergoing rapid tourism-led transformation.

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