

Manifestations of Spatial Practices in Living Heritage and Sustaining them Amidst the Pressures of Tourism: Insights from Lộc Yên Ancient Village in Rural Vietnam

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Abstract

Living heritage is not fixed and does not exist only in the past. They continue to interact with the daily lives of the local people and give rise to numerous spatial practices. In the process, cultural values are kept, adjusted, and renewed through everyday activities, while shared memories, and social relationships are nourished. The Lộc Yên Ancient Village in Da Nang City, Vietnam is a form of living heritage. It is a place that is always lived-in, changing and developing. In Lộc Yên, heritage is present not only in the ancient houses, gardens, and the village layout, but also in the daily practices, habits, family traditions, and community life. Space is not only a physical setting. It is a place where people live, feel, and express their identity. In this context, this paper examines the ways in which the spatial practices manifest in the Lộc Yên Ancient Village in Rural Vietnam and sustain them against the pressures of Tourism. The paper brings insights from its living heritage.

It adopts a qualitative research approach and combines field observations, site surveys, and semi-structured interviews with local residents and key community stakeholders. Drawing upon concepts from living heritage studies, spatial practice theory, rural cultural landscapes, and sustainable tourism, the research explores the dynamic relationships between architecture, landscape, community life, and everyday cultural practices. Particular attention is given to activities such as dwelling, gardening, farming, social gathering, and ritual performances, through which spaces acquire meanings and heritage values which are continuously enacted.

The paper posits that Lộc Yên should not be seen as a preserved place separated from modern life. It concludes that Lộc Yên is a living system where people, space, and memories are closely connected. Cultural continuity enables heritage to continue living and growing in the new conditions of the presence of increasing tourism. It is suggested that any efforts to sustain authenticity of this place should focus not only on protecting buildings by conservation, but also on supporting the everyday life that keeps heritage meaningful.

Keywords: Spatial practices, Living heritage, Tourism, Lộc Yên ancient village, Vietnam

Introduction

In recent decades, with the rapid growth of globalization and urbanization, understanding of heritage has changed in important ways. Heritage is no longer seen only as buildings, objects, or traces of the past that must be preserved in their original forms. It is now understood as a living entity closely connected to people and contemporary life. Many studies have shown that the value of heritage lies not only in its physical form, but also in its ability to be maintained, continued, and renewed through everyday cultural practices of the community (Ashworth & Larkham, 2013; Boniface & Fowler, 1993). When viewed this way, heritage is not frozen. Indeed, it becomes part of daily life, always changing while still keeping its core identity.

In rural Vietnam, ancient villages are a special type of heritage where physical and non-physical elements are closely connected. Village spaces are not only an arrangement of houses, roads and landscapes. They comprise a cultural system that reflects the social structure, community relationships, and the worldview of the local people. In fact, studies on traditional villages have emphasized that space and life cannot be separated. Each house, pathway, and garden carries layers of cultural and historical meanings built over time (Trần Từ, 1984; Kleinen, 2007). For this reason, studying ancient villages requires a broad and deep approach, going beyond physical descriptions to understand the cultural lives that unfold within.

It is notable that Lộc Yên Ancient Village in Quảng Nam Province is a significant heritage place, that faces increasing pressures of tourism. The village is known not only for its well-preserved traditional houses, but also for its unique spatial structure, where architecture, landscape, and topography are closely integrated. Stone pathways, green gardens surrounding houses, and the slow pace of daily life together create spaces which are both visually attractive and deeply connected to the relationships between people and Nature. However, despite being exposed to tourism, the village still maintains its authenticity.

Nguyễn (2011) describes Lộc Yên as a distinctive cultural space where traditional values are still maintained in present life. However, if Lộc Yên is viewed only through its physical features, its full meaning cannot be well understood. It is therefore important to place Lộc Yên within a broader theoretical framework as a living heritage, where space and culture are always in motion and closely connected. In this view, space is not only a setting for activities; it is part of life itself. Daily practices such as family life, farming, social interactions, and ritual activities all contribute to maintaining and renewing heritage values. Culture is not only something from the past. It exists in the present, in the way people live and interact with their environment.

From this perspective, Lộc Yên is not only an object of preservation, but a living system where past and present exist together and support each other. Studying Lộc Yên as a living heritage helps to better understand the nature of traditional villages in Vietnam. It also provides important ideas for heritage conservation and development in the modern context, where the need for economic growth and the protection of cultural identity are both increasingly important.

In this context, this research examines the manifestations of spatial practices in Lộc Yên village and sustaining them amidst the pressures of tourism. Its aim is to offer insights into the nuances of habitation in the presence of cultural transformations in this ancient village. Its objectives are:

- To identify the everyday spatial practices that manifest within the village spaces.
- To ascertain the forces and processes that underly these manifestations.
- To identify the pressures of tourism upon the spatial practices of the village.
- To derive principles and practices that can be employed for heritage conservation in order to preserve its authenticity.

Theoretical Framework

Living Heritage

In recent decades, heritage studies have undergone a significant conceptual shift. Conventional conservation approaches viewed heritage primarily as a collection of physical monuments, historic buildings, artifacts, and sites whose authenticity depended largely on the

preservation of their material fabric. Contemporary scholarship, however, increasingly recognizes heritage as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a static product (Wijesuriya, 2018; Poullos, 2014). From this perspective, heritage is understood as something that continues to live through the people who engage with it. Rather than existing solely in material objects, heritage derives meanings from ongoing social interactions, cultural practices, and everyday experiences. Heritage is therefore continuously produced, negotiated, and reinterpreted through human activities and relationships within specific cultural contexts (Poullos, 2014; Nigel, 2020). This understanding aligns with the concept of living heritage, which emphasizes continuity, community engagement, and the active role of local people in sustaining cultural values over time (Schnüttgen, 2024).

Living heritage highlights the importance of everyday practices in maintaining cultural continuity. Activities such as residing in traditional houses, cultivating historic gardens, performing rituals, transmitting local knowledge, and participating in community gatherings contribute to the ongoing vitality of heritage places. These routine practices are not merely cultural expressions but constitute mechanisms through which heritage remains relevant and meaningful across generations (Huong, 2015; De Filippi, 2005). Consequently, heritage conservation is increasingly understood as a process that supports living communities and their cultural practices rather than focusing exclusively on the protection of physical structures (Chen & Wang, 2024; Quang, 2022).

A central feature of the living heritage approach is the recognition that heritage is continuously adapted to changing social, economic, and environmental conditions. While communities maintain connections to inherited traditions, they also reinterpret and modify these traditions in response to contemporary needs. Such adaptations do not necessarily diminish authenticity; instead, they can strengthen the relevance and sustainability of heritage by ensuring its continued integration into daily life (Poullos, 2014; Wijesuriya, 2018). This perspective has become particularly important in heritage tourism contexts, where maintaining the balance between authenticity, community participation, and visitor experiences is essential for sustainable development (Zhao et al., 2024; Cantoni, 2020). Accordingly, conservation efforts increasingly emphasize people-place relationships, community participation, and cultural continuity as fundamental components of heritage sustainability. Heritage survives not only because physical structures remain intact but because communities continue to practice, experience, and assign meanings to them. Chen & Wang (2024) and Schnüttgen (2024) thus point out that through these ongoing interactions between people, places, and culture, heritage remains a living and evolving phenomenon capable of adapting to future challenges while preserving its cultural significance.

Spatial Practices

The concept of spatial practices originates from the critical spatial theory and emphasizes the ways in which individuals and communities interact with, use, and experience spaces in everyday life. Rather than viewing space as a passive physical setting, spatial practices understand space as something actively produced and reproduced through human actions, movements, routines, and social relations (Liggett & Perry, 1995; Dodd, 2019).

Spatial practices encompass the daily activities through which people inhabit and give meaning to places. These may include patterns of movement, social interaction, work, leisure, rituals, and other forms of engagement with the built and natural environment. Through repeated actions, individuals contribute to the creation of social meanings and cultural identities associated with particular places (Anderson & Jones, 2009; Dodd, 2019). Consequently, space is not merely a physical container but a lived environment shaped by human experience and collective memory.

In heritage settings, spatial practices play a crucial role in sustaining the relationship between communities and their cultural landscapes. Traditional settlements, historic villages, and heritage sites remain culturally significant not simply because of their physical characteristics but because people continue to use and engage with them in meaningful ways. Everyday activities such as farming, maintaining houses, conducting ceremonies, or interacting within communal spaces help reproduce cultural values and strengthen social cohesion (Huong, 2015; Chen &

Wang, 2024). The relationship between living heritage and spatial practices is particularly significant because heritage continuity depends on the persistence of everyday interactions between people and places. Spatial practices provide the mechanisms through which cultural knowledge, traditions, and collective memories are enacted and transmitted. As communities engage with heritage spaces through daily routines and social activities, they continuously reaffirm cultural identity while adapting heritage to contemporary circumstances (Quang, 2022; Nigel, 2020).

Therefore, understanding heritage through the lens of spatial practices offers a more comprehensive approach to conservation and sustainable development. It shifts attention from the preservation of physical objects alone toward the lived experiences, social interactions, and cultural processes that enable heritage places to remain active, meaningful, and resilient over time (Poulios, 2014; Dodd, 2019). According to Rapoport (1969), space is closely connected to social structure and cultural values. It is not only a physical arrangement of houses, paths, and land, but also a reflection of how people live together as a community. Oliver (1989) adds that the organization of space particularly in traditional settings often follows kinship systems, beliefs, social practices, and patterns of social interactions.

In fact, each element within a traditional setting carries meaning. As Cooper (1974) points out, a house is not only a place to live, but also a symbol of family identity and continuity. Similarly, a garden is not only for growing food, but also a space for rest, interactions, and connection with Nature. Pathways are not only for movement, but also for linking different parts of the community. These elements serve practical purposes, yet they also hold cultural and historical significance. Through daily use, they become part of shared memory and identity.

Because of this, a village space can be understood as a cultural landscape. Li et al. (2024) and Chen et al. (2024) show that in such a landscape, physical elements and non-physical values are closely connected. Material forms such as buildings and land are shaped by cultural practices, and at the same time, these forms support and influence social life. The landscape is therefore not fixed. It changes over time as people continue to live, use, and reinterpret it. Undeniably, spatial practices, meaning the ways people use and interact with spaces, play a key role in this process. They give meaning to space and help maintain cultural continuity.

Review of Literature

There is a considerable extent of research into ancient villages in rural Vietnam. However, specific research that examines spatial practices are rare. Many studies focus upon communal structures, agricultural adaptations, and architectural preservation. For example, Trần Tũ, (1984) and Kleinen (2007) have shown that village spaces express relationships between families, generations, and the wider community, as well as the connections between people and their spiritual world. Similarly, Ha (2008) examines Hoi An ancient town and presents the real situation there and offers an assessment of the complexity of cultural heritage management. Ha Trieu Huy (2022) also examines the cultural values of Duong Lam ancient village in Hanoi, and presents the issues of conservation and development.

Notably, 'The peoples' Army News Letter' also presents research into numerous historical villages that have been subject to the Vietnam war. For example, it presents Mai Xa: an ancient village on the banks of the Hieu River in Quang Tri province, and says that it is well known for its rich cultural heritage and long-standing traditions associated with learning (2026: July 24 issue).

Interestingly, among these studies, Duong Lam village has gained a lot of attention. For example, Dang Bang (2005) examines the history of Duong Lam and proposes a process of research to provide information for any future developments. Most notably, Phung (2006) examines Duong Lam in terms of traditions and modernity and presents the achievements of the state in the preservation of the village. Moreover, he also shows how the problems of the village are managed in the context of urbanization and the negative influences of the market economy. Indeed, these studies show that ancient villages in rural Vietnam have been studied extensively. However, as said, there are hardly any studies examining these villages from the point of view of spatial practices. This research is intended to contribute to fill this gap in research.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the relationship between spatial practices and living heritage in Lộc Yên Ancient Village, a nationally recognized heritage village in Da Nang City, Vietnam. Indeed, it is a case study. The research is informed by the concepts of living heritage, spatial practices, rural cultural landscapes, and sustainable tourism. In addition to documenting spatial characteristics and everyday activities, the semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture local residents' perceptions of living heritage, cultural continuity, and tourism development. Rather than serving as stand-alone narratives, the interview findings were used to complement field observations and spatial analysis by providing insights into how community members understand, experience, and sustain their everyday spatial practices. The integration of observational and interview data enabled methodological triangulation, thereby strengthening the credibility and interpretation of the research findings. These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding how heritage values are continuously reproduced through everyday actions and social relationships. Rather than treating heritage as a collection of static physical objects, the study examines how cultural meanings are embedded within lived experiences and spatial practices.

Drawing upon perspectives from cultural anthropology, heritage studies, and rural spatial research, the study employs multiple qualitative methods to collect and interpret data. The case study method was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of the complex interactions between people, spaces, culture, and everyday life within a specific socio-cultural context. Fieldwork was conducted through direct observations, site surveys, spatial analysis, and semi-structured interviews with local residents, village elders, community representatives, and tourism-related stakeholders. Observations focus on both the physical environment and everyday activities occurring within the village. Spatial analysis examines the organization of traditional houses, gardens, stone fences, pathways, communal spaces, and the broader cultural landscape. Particular attention is given to how residents inhabit, use, and experience these spaces through daily routines, agricultural activities, social interactions, and ritual practices.

Data interpretation follows an interdisciplinary approach. Heritage studies contribute to understanding cultural continuity and heritage transmission across generations, while cultural anthropology offers insights into local knowledge, social relationships, and community-based practices. Rural spatial studies provide a framework for examining the production and use of space within traditional village environments. In addition, a relevant literature supports the development of the analytical framework and guides the interpretation of empirical findings. By integrating these methods and perspectives, the study provides a holistic understanding of Lộc Yên as a living heritage landscape in which architecture, space, culture, memory, and community life remain closely interconnected and continuously evolve in response to contemporary socio-economic and tourism-related changes.

The Case Study

Loc Yen Ancient Village is located in Thanh Binh Commune, Danang City. According to the official introduction to the site, offered in [danangfantasticity.com](https://danangfantasticity.com/en/architecture/loc-yen-ancient-village) website, “true to its name, the village offers a sense of tranquility, with the poetic landscape characteristic of the central uplands of Vietnam” (<https://danangfantasticity.com/en/architecture/loc-yen-ancient-village>). The village is inundated with lush green trees and plants unique to Vietnam, and is surrounded by paddy fields and the jungle. Its traditional houses are nestled along mossy stone lanes and are shaded beneath lush, fruit gardens that produce an abundance of fruits year-round. Together, they produce a gentle, peaceful beauty of a rural landscape that is typical of the Vietnam’s countryside.



Fig. 1: The Rural Landscape of Loc Yen ancient village, Da Nang City, Vietnam

Source: <https://www.peak.com/tin-pho-district-qung-nam-vietnam/r0xbmxm/discovering-the-timeless-charm-of-loc-yen-village/ar0nbrax6>

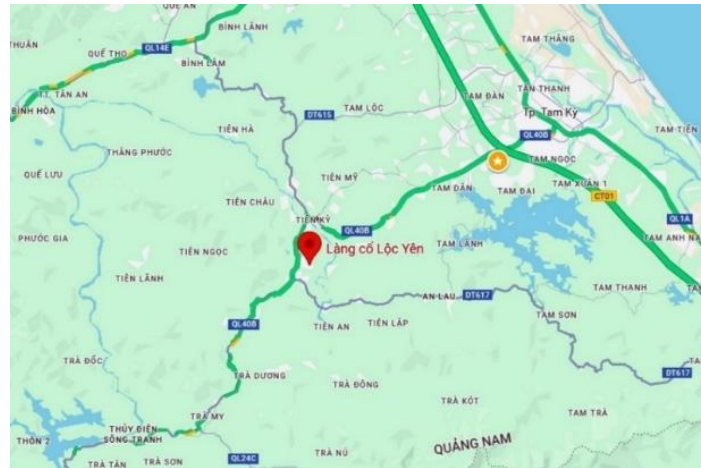


Fig. 2: The location of Loc Yen ancient village, Da Nang City, Vietnam
Source: google map



Fig. 3: The village well at the entrance of Loc Yen Ancient Village
Source: Đoàn Lê, Tourism Magazine.2022



Fig. 4: The village road and the paddy fields of Loc Yen Ancient Village
Source: <https://danangfantasticity.com/en/architecture/loc-yen-ancient-village>

Findings

Spatial Practices in Lộc Yên: Houses and Lanes

The spatial practices of the village are Lộc Yên unique and ordinary at the same time. They arise from everyday life and habitation of the people as well as the rituals and the customs and cultural practices preserved from its earliest days, as far back as the 18th century. Most noteworthy is that its spaces are created within and the outsides of the traditional wooden houses situated besides mossy stone lanes. The village today has eight traditional wooden houses, crafted primarily using jackfruit wood which is a durable local material. In fact, even after centuries of ware and tare, their beams, pillars, and finely carved wooden details remain intact, reflecting the craftsmanship of the artisans of the past, which continue to be practiced even to date.

Indeed, each house is a living space that holds precious memories of clans and the village community accommodating, prompting and enabling the spatial practices of daily living such as cooking, eating, sleeping and socializing as well as tending to the gardens and the paddy fields, fruit pricking as well as involving in games and other recreation activities. Although one might argue that such daily activities happen almost in every village across the world, of the ways in which they are absorbed into culture and form their consciousness is unique. For example, the most famous folk saying associated with Lộc Yên ancient village, is the romantic local couplet: "Có duyên lấy đặng chồng nguồn / Ngồi trên ngõ đá có buồn cũng vui." It means: "if destined to marry a man from the upstream source, sitting on the stone alleyway brings joy even amidst any sorrow that comes along with it." Indeed, this shows how the stone paved alleyways of the village are deeply embedded in the daily life experiences as much as the essence of 'being' and 'becoming.'

Field observations indicate that spatial practices in Lộc Yên are deeply embedded in the reciprocal relationship between architecture, landscape, and everyday life. Rather than functioning as a static collection of historic buildings, the village operates as a living socio-spatial system where space is continuously created, interpreted, and renewed through the daily activities of its inhabitants. In this sense, the significance of Lộc Yên does not lie solely in its physical appearance but in the ways local people inhabit, move through, and assign meaning to the spaces they use. The organization of houses, gardens, agricultural land, pathways, and communal spaces therefore reflects not only environmental adaptation but also a long-established cultural logic that continues to structure everyday life.

Unlike many villages in the lowlands, where relatively flat terrain allows settlements to expand horizontally, the spatial organization of Lộc Yên has evolved in direct response to its hilly topography. Before constructing a house, residents first create a level platform on the hillside large enough to accommodate the principal components of the homestead. A traditional dwelling typically consists of the main house (nhà chính), the connecting house (nhà cầu), and the side house (nhà ngang), with the side house consistently positioned on the eastern side of the main house. Behind these structures are the kitchen and livestock shelters, whose locations vary according to the natural slope of the terrain. Wells are usually located in front of or beside the house to utilize water flowing from the rocky hillside, while ponds, gardens, orchards, and cultivated land extend outward from the dwelling. This spatial configuration illustrates that the homestead was conceived not as an isolated building but as an integrated living environment in which domestic, productive, and ecological spaces function together.

The spatial arrangement of the homestead gives rise to a continuous sequence of everyday practices. Residents move repeatedly between the house, courtyard, garden, kitchen, livestock areas, wells, and cultivated land throughout the day. Preparing meals, collecting water, tending gardens, feeding animals, harvesting crops, and maintaining the household are not isolated activities but interconnected practices that reinforce the functional and social relationships between different parts of the property. Consequently, spaces in Lộc Yên are experienced as a network of everyday movements rather than as a collection of independent architectural objects.



Fig 5: Typical spatial organization of the traditional garden house of Nguyễn Đình Mẫn, Lộc Yên Ancient Village, Da Nang City, Vietnam, indicating the main house (nhà chính), connecting house (nhà cầu), side house (nhà ngang), kitchen, well, pond, garden, and surrounding agricultural landscape.

Source: Field survey data, Aerial photograph by Lê Bá Lộc using Flycam, July 2026.¹

The interview findings further support these observations. Residents consistently described the ancestral house not only as a physical dwelling but also as the symbolic centre of family life where ancestor worship, family gatherings, and important rituals continue to take place across generations. Likewise, participants explained that the garden extends beyond its productive function, serving as a shared space for everyday interaction, intergenerational learning, and the transmission of local knowledge related to cultivation, seasonal rhythms, and traditional ways of living. These perspectives reinforce the interpretation that the cultural significance of domestic and garden spaces lies not simply in their physical preservation but in their continuous use as living environments.

Dwelling itself constitutes an important spatial practice. Field observations show that the traditional house supports multiple layers of daily life beyond its residential functions. The front courtyard provides a place for welcoming neighbours and visitors, while the veranda serves as a transitional space for resting, repairing farming equipment, sorting harvested products, and informal family conversations.

Interior spaces accommodate family meals, ancestor worship, and intergenerational gatherings. During festivals, anniversaries, and ritual ceremonies, these same spaces are temporarily transformed into places of collective remembrance and cultural performance. The changing use of domestic space throughout the day and across the seasons demonstrates that architectural meaning is continuously reconstructed through everyday occupation rather than remaining permanently fixed. Gardens represent another fundamental manifestation of spatial practices. Unlike ornamental landscapes designed primarily for visual appreciation, gardens in Lộc Yên are multifunctional environments where ecological adaptation, food production, and social life coexist. Fruit trees, vegetables, medicinal plants, and ornamental species are cultivated together, creating a productive landscape that simultaneously regulates the microclimate, provides food, and supports family interaction. Gardening is undertaken collectively by different generations of the household, allowing ecological knowledge, cultivation techniques, and local traditions to be transmitted through everyday practice. The garden therefore functions as a living cultural landscape where environmental knowledge and social relationships are continuously reproduced.

Agricultural practices further extend these spatial relationships beyond the immediate household. Daily movements between the house, orchards, rice fields, and surrounding hills establishes a recurring rhythm that structures village life.

¹ The research team involved in the field survey collected data under the research project "Developing Tourism Products for Lộc Yên Ancient Village." It was led by Dr. Nguyễn Thị Bích Vân, University of Architecture Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Farming activities are closely synchronized with seasonal changes, water availability, and community cooperation. These routines not only sustain local livelihoods but also reinforce long-term relationships between people and the land. Through repeated cultivation and environmental management, the agricultural landscape becomes both a productive space and a repository of collective memory.

Circulation within the village also reflects important spatial practices. The stone pathways that connect houses are not simply circulation routes but social spaces where encounters occur naturally throughout the day. Residents greet neighbours, exchange agricultural products, discuss village affairs, and pause for conversations while moving between homes, gardens, and communal spaces. These routine interactions strengthen social cohesion and reinforce a shared understanding of the village's spatial organization. The pathways therefore perform both physical and social functions, connecting architecture, landscape, and community life into a coherent living system.



Fig 6: Stone pathways functioning as spaces for everyday social interactions
Source: Field survey data



Fig. 7: Stone pathways and the gate way of Lộc Yên Ancient Village
Source: <https://danangfantasticity.com/en/architecture/loc-yen-ancient-village>

Construction practices themselves further demonstrate the close relationship between local knowledge and the spatial environment. Early houses were built almost entirely from locally available materials, including bamboo, timber, earth, stone, and thatch. As economic conditions improved and transportation became more accessible during the twentieth century, timber-frame houses with tiled roofs gradually replaced earlier bamboo structures. Nevertheless, these architectural transformations did not fundamentally alter the traditional spatial organization of the homestead. Instead, they illustrate the adaptive capacity of the community, whereby new materials have been incorporated while preserving the established relationships between buildings, gardens, productive landscapes, and everyday practices.



Fig 8: The multi-generational living space preserved in its original form.

Source: Author, July 2026 ²

According to the observations, Lộc Yên presents a clear and meaningful relationship between spaces and everyday life. The village is shaped by a distinctive spatial structure in which architecture, terrain, and landscape are closely connected. Stone pathways wind through the settlement, linking clusters of garden houses that follow the natural slope of the land. Trees, gardens, and open spaces surround the houses and create a setting that feels balanced, calm, and adaptable. Indeed, this spatial organization is not accidental. It reflects a long process of adjustment between people and their natural environment.

In this model, living spaces and ecological spaces are not separated. Indeed, the house is not an isolated structure. It is part of a wider system that includes the garden, the surrounding land, and everyday activities. The garden supports farming and food production, but it also provides spaces for rest, social interactions, and family life. This close connection between the houses and the gardens shows a way of living that values harmony between people and Nature. It also reflects a cultural understanding in which space is both practical and meaningful.

Notably, spaces in Lộc Yên gain their meanings through use. They are defined not only by their physical forms, but by how people live in them. Daily practices such as farming, taking care of plants, cooking, gathering with family members, and performing rituals all contribute to shaping the spaces. These activities are repeated over time, and through this repetition, they give continuity to both spaces and culture. Spaces are therefore not fixed or static. They change, adapt, and develop together with the lives of the people who use them.

As observed, one of the most unique aspects of the village is the system of stone lanes, stone wells, and stone fences surrounding the gardens—carefully assembled from local mountain stones. Over time, rain and sun have painted these winding paths in shades of moss, creating a picturesque harmony between architecture and Nature.

For this reason, spaces in Lộc Yên are not fixed. They are always changing and adapting along with the life of the community, responding to cyclical rhythms and climatic changes as well as people's seasonal activities. They are not only things that exist physically, but are continuously shaped by human activities and experiences. The village is therefore not simply preserved as it was in the past. Indeed, it is actively maintained and renewed through daily life. This ongoing process is what gives Lộc Yên its identity as a living heritage.

² The main house continues to serve both as a reception area for guests and as the family ancestral worship space. Subsequent generations have only added a separate auxiliary kitchen to accommodate daily domestic activities without altering the spatial organization or cultural functions of the main house.

The findings demonstrate that spatial practices in Lộc Yên cannot be understood as isolated activities. Dwelling, gardening, farming, movements across spaces, construction, and ritual practices together form an integrated socio-spatial system through which architecture, landscape, and community life continuously interact. The physical environment acquires meanings because it is repeatedly inhabited, experienced, and interpreted through everyday actions. Heritage therefore survives not simply because traditional buildings remain intact, but because local residents continue to reproduce cultural values through their daily engagement with the spaces they inhabit. These continuous interactions among people, places, and practices constitutes the foundation of Lộc Yên as a living heritage landscape, enabling the village to adapt to changing socio-economic conditions while maintaining its cultural identity.



Fig 9: A key feature of Lộc Yên is the garden house
Source: A Lăng Ngược)

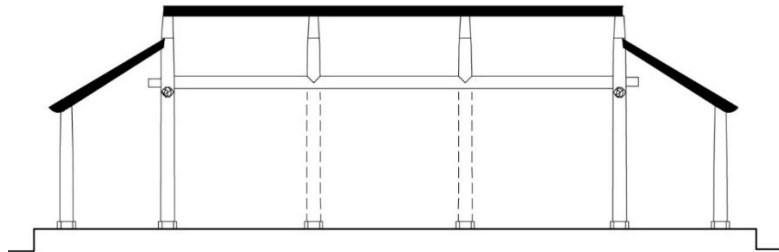


Fig 10: A key feature of Lộc Yên is the garden house
Source: A Lăng Ngược)

Community Memory and Cultural Continuity

The findings indicate that Lộc Yên Ancient Village functions not only as a physical settlement but also as a living cultural system sustained by collective memory, social relationships, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. The significance of the village extends beyond its traditional architecture, gardens, and spatial organization. Its heritage value is embedded in the memories, experiences, and cultural practices that continue to shape everyday life. These memories are not preserved solely through physical objects or historic structures; rather, they are continuously reproduced through social interaction, family traditions, and shared cultural experiences.

Community memory plays a fundamental role in sustaining the living heritage of Lộc Yên. Local residents maintain strong connections to ancestral histories, family lineages, traditional customs, and place-based knowledge. Such memories are embedded within everyday

spaces and practices, transforming houses, gardens, pathways, and communal spaces into repositories of cultural meaning. Through storytelling, social gatherings, and daily interactions, cultural knowledge is transmitted across generations, strengthening a shared sense of identity and belonging. The study further reveals that cultural continuity is maintained through ordinary rather than extraordinary activities. Practices such as ancestor worship, family gatherings, seasonal agricultural activities, and community rituals are integrated into everyday life rather than being staged for external audiences.

Although these activities may appear routine, their repeated performance reinforces social cohesion and cultural identity. In this way, everyday practices function as mechanisms through which heritage values are continually enacted and renewed. Importantly, the findings suggest that continuity does not imply cultural stagnation. Consistent with contemporary living heritage perspectives, culture in Lộc Yên is not simply preserved in its original form but is continuously adapted to changing circumstances. Residents modify certain practices in response to socio-economic transformations and tourism developments while maintaining core cultural values and social relationships. This adaptive capacity enables heritage to remain relevant and meaningful without losing its cultural integrity.

The case of Lộc Yên therefore demonstrates that living heritage depends not only on the conservation of physical structures but also on the continuity of community memory and cultural practices. Heritage survives because local people continue to inhabit, experience, interpret, and recreate it through daily life. The dynamic interaction between memory, practice, and place allows cultural identity to be sustained while simultaneously accommodating change. This process represents one of the key foundations of heritage resilience and long-term sustainability in rural living heritage communities.

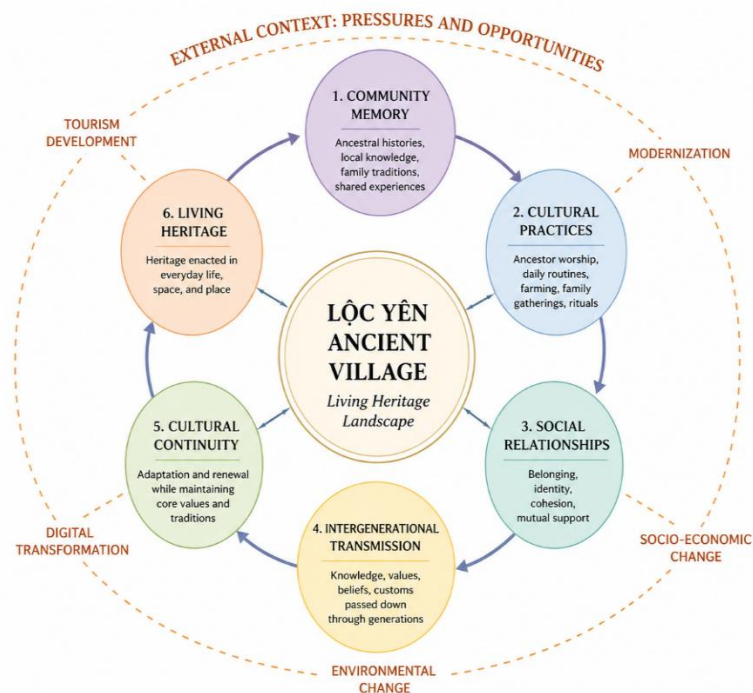


Fig 11: Community Memory and Cultural Continuity in Lộc Yên Ancient Village.

Source: Field studies

Discussion: Living Heritage and Tourism

The findings suggest that the heritage value of Lộc Yên Ancient Village is sustained not only through its physical fabric but also through the spatial practices that continue to shape everyday life. Activities such as dwelling in traditional houses, maintaining gardens, cultivating agricultural land, participating in community gatherings, and performing rituals represent more

than routine actions; they are mechanisms through which cultural meanings, collective memories, and local identities are continuously reproduced. These practices demonstrate that Lộc Yên functions as a living heritage landscape where heritage is enacted through everyday interactions between people and place. The study further reveals that spatial practices play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of living heritage. The traditional village structure, including houses, gardens, stone fences, pathways, and communal spaces, provides the physical setting within which cultural practices are performed. At the same time, these spaces acquire significance because they are actively used and experienced by local residents. This finding supports the living heritage perspective, which views heritage as an ongoing social and cultural process rather than a collection of preserved objects (Poulios, 2014; Wijesuriya, 2018).

Interviews with community representatives and tourism-related stakeholders indicate that local residents generally support tourism development when it contributes to improving livelihoods and promoting local cultural values. At the same time, they emphasized that tourism should remain compatible with the existing rhythm of village life and should not interfere with traditional spatial practices or transform everyday cultural activities into performances designed primarily for visitors. These perspectives suggest that future tourism planning should continue to place community interests and heritage authenticity at its centre.

However, the increasing development of tourism introduces both opportunities and challenges for sustaining these spatial practices. Tourism has contributed to raising awareness of Lộc Yên's cultural significance, generating economic benefits, and encouraging heritage conservation initiatives. Greater visitor interest may also strengthen local appreciation of traditional knowledge and cultural landscapes. Nevertheless, tourism creates pressures that alter the relationships between people, spaces, and heritage when developments prioritize visitor consumption over community life. One of the most significant risks is the transformation of everyday cultural practices into staged performances designed primarily for the tourists. When rituals, social activities, or traditional lifestyles are modified to satisfy visitor expectations, their cultural meanings may gradually become detached from the community that originally produced them. Similarly, spatial changes driven by tourism infrastructure, commercialization, or aesthetic enhancements may also weaken the authenticity of lived experiences and disrupt traditional patterns of spatial use. Under such conditions, heritage may remain physically preserved while losing its living character.

Possible impact of Tourism on Spatial Practices

Indeed, as this research shows, the local residents cherish the heritage left by their ancestors, maintaining a lifestyle marked by simplicity, sincerity, and harmony. First and foremost, they remain as farmers tending to land and deriving their livelihoods from the ample resources offered by the 'mother earth.' Village as a collection of spaces exists between earth and the sky which the villages treat with reverence and respect. All the memories emanating from the spatial practices in the village thus are couched within these two entities. Nevertheless, the presence of tourists in this authentic space and some of its spatial practices that manifest in the outdoors could certainly be affected by tourism.



Fig 12: Tourists visiting the Lộc Yên Ancient Village.

Source: <https://www.backpackerdeals.com/vietnam/hoi-an/daytrip-to-loc-yen-ancient-village-and-o-o-waterfall-from-hoi-an-full-day-guided-tour?srsltid=AfmBOormoOOoJ7EC0U87dwtuhuXaIUNt0UwPJCG0YGqb8USLYVqDZbLd>

Following are some possible scenarios, as depicted in the Fig. 12

1. The villages create gardens around the houses and also define small enclaves where people can enjoy fresh fruits. They pick seasonal fruits such as lòn bon, mangosteen, oranges, and tangerines directly in the local gardens. Tourists are attracted to these places. In fact, with tourism, today this activity is often intruded by the outsiders - tourists. Their very presence may affect the ambience as well as the meanings and memories of this practice and the places.
2. Tending the paddy fields: this is a daily practice mostly of the men, although women also take part. Lunch is often served in designated patches of the paddy fields where the farmers gather, socializing and sharing feelings, experiences and comradeship. Tourists are likely to visit the places and in which case, the meanings and memories as well as the practices themselves may eventually change.
3. Playing folk games which demonstrate traditional craftmaking especially weaving with areca palm sheaths. Similarly, practicing and playing the game of the mysterious rotating table. In this, one places one's hands on it and focuses one's intention, and the table gently rotates in the direction one imagines. Undeniably, these are practices and places which will attract the tourists and their presence and participation is likely to alter the meanings and memories of this practice if and when this will begin to cater more to the tourists than the locals.

In other words, the case of Lộc Yên as it is being promoted for tourism today demonstrates that sustaining living heritage requires protecting not only historic buildings and landscapes and showing them to tourists but also nourish the genuine everyday spatial practices that give these places meanings. Sustainable tourism should therefore be guided by community participation and respect for existing socio-spatial structures and practices. Local residents should remain central actors in heritage management and tourism planning, ensuring that such developments bring minimal intrusions to culture and support rather than affect or replace traditional ways of inhabiting and using space. Tourism should be integrated into the existing life of the village rather than impose external models of heritage consumption. This is indeed a mammoth task.

In this respect, Lộc Yên offers an important example of how living heritage can coexist with tourism development, as it has happened thus far. The village provides visitors with opportunities to engage with authentic everyday life rather than merely observe heritage as a static attraction. Through interaction with local spaces, practices, and communities, visitors can experience heritage as a living process. Such an approach not only enriches tourism experiences but also contributes to the long-term sustainability of heritage by reinforcing the dynamic relationships between people, places, memory, and cultural continuity.

Conclusion

This study examined the spatial practices manifesting at Lộc Yên ancient village viewing it as a living heritage in rural Vietnam. It shows that heritage is not only about keeping things from the past, but also about continuity and the ability to keep heritage alive in everyday life. The integration of field observations with residents' perspectives also demonstrates that the sustainability of living heritage cannot be understood solely through physical documentation. Local perceptions provide essential evidence of how heritage values are experienced, interpreted, and transmitted through everyday life. This highlights the importance of community voices in both heritage conservation and sustainable tourism planning (Cantoni et al. (2022).

It is noted that this village demonstrates how space, culture, and community are closely connected and how this connection enables heritage to survive and flourish over time. So far, the numbers of visitors have been small and the village has not been inundated by tourists. Most notably, no intrusive developments have taken place that cater to the tourists. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that this will continue to remain the same in the future.

In this context, this study reveals several important insights.

1. Space plays a central role in shaping cultural identity. The way houses, gardens, and pathways are organized reflects how people live and understand their world.
2. Community practices are the main force that sustains heritage. Daily activities, social interactions, and cultural traditions help maintain continuity from one generation to another.
3. Tourism must be developed with care. It should respect both the spatial structure of the village and the cultural life of the community. Lộc Yên is not only a heritage site. It is a living system where past and present exist together with deep meanings for the people. The village continues to change, but it does not lose its identity. Instead, it adapts while keeping its core values.

Lộc Yên therefore offers important insights for promoting heritage development in rural Vietnam. It suggests that sustainable development should not focus only on preserving physical forms. It should also support the everyday life that gives heritage meanings. It is only by maintaining the connections between people, space, and culture that heritage can continue to live and remain relevant in the future.

Nevertheless, this study has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strength lies in the fact that it closely examined the spatial practices that manifest in the village and revealed how they are deeply embedded in the culture, ancient traditions as well as the nuances of spatial understanding possessed by the people, articulated through reverence to Nature and the Mother Earth. At the same time, however, it is a brief study of general observations and perceptions constructed largely by the research team and has not delved deep into the people's own perceptions and conceptualizations of how the changes are taking place. It is suggested that such in-depth studies are needed to construct a more wholesome understanding of how to nurture the living heritage of Lộc Yên.

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Ethical Practice: This research followed accepted ethical standards. It did not involve the collection of sensitive personal data, and all interactions with the local participants were conducted with respect, transparency, and voluntary participation.

Availability of Data: The data used in this study are part of a broader research dataset on Lộc Yên Ancient Village. Selected materials are presented in this paper and can be made available for any academic review upon reasonable request.

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