

## Silent Dissent and Embodied Memory: Reframing Community Participation in Vietnam's Peri-Urban Heritage

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### ABSTRACT

In rapidly urbanizing peri-urban zones of Vietnam, heritage is not simply preserved—it is contested, reframed, and at times, quietly resisted. This study investigates how communities in Hoai Duc, a transitional district on the edge of Hanoi, engage in extra-institutional heritage negotiations that defy dominant models of participation and development. Drawing on 312 surveys and 15 in-depth interviews, the study identifies not only generational and symbolic stratifications within the community, but also affective and embodied forms of participation—including ritual withdrawal, selective silence, and gendered memory practices often ignored in heritage policy. Challenging the ideal of consensus-driven community-based heritage management (CBHM), the research introduces the CHD (Community–Heritage–Development) model as a critical heuristic that exposes hidden asymmetries and symbolic exclusions in heritage governance. Anchored in postcolonial theory, ethics of care, and epistemic disobedience, this model reframes heritage not as a fixed legacy, but as an unstable infrastructure of memory—a shifting, fragmentary system of tangible and intangible elements whose meanings are continually renegotiated amid social inequality (Saputra, 2024). In Hoai Duc, this appears when residents withdraw from communal worship after undesired restoration or move ancestral rites to private spaces—negotiated through friction, stratification, and dissent. The findings highlight that in the Global South, especially in urbanizing peripheries, community agency manifests not through formal dialogue but through moral, embodied, and affective practices. As such, this article calls for a rethinking of participatory heritage frameworks to accommodate symbolic resistance, informal knowledge systems, and the performative ethics of local memory-making.

**Keywords:** community agency, silent dissent, embodied memory, peri-urban heritage, CHD model, postcolonial critique

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cultural heritage studies have undergone a notable shift away from technocratic and object-centered frameworks, towards understanding heritage as a social process—rich in emotional, ethical, and political dimensions (Harrison, 2013; Labadi, 2013; Ireland et al., 2025). Contemporary debates increasingly focus on the right to define heritage values, modes of community participation, and the capacity to negotiate memory—particularly in postcolonial or rapidly urbanizing contexts—thus exposing the limitations of top-down conservation models that dominated much of the twentieth century (Smith, 2006; de la Bellacasa, 2011; Mbembe, 2001).

Empirical research has highlighted persistent tensions between “vernacular practices” and “official heritage governance frameworks.” In Spain, Pastor Pérez and Colomer (2024) demonstrated how forms of “authorised participation” often remain merely symbolic, undermining communities’ capacity to define their own cultural values. In China and Southeast Asia, studies by Fabbri et al. (2020) and Zhang et al. (2024a) revealed how state-driven reconstruction models tend to position communities as passive consumers of memory rather than co-creative agents. Meanwhile, Woodhead (2023) and Waterton and Smith (2010) have shown that “community participation” is frequently constrained by symbolic boundaries, where representational power lies beyond the reach of local residents. These analyses raise a pressing global question: Who has the right to define heritage, and who is permitted to be present within shared spaces of memory?

Nevertheless, most existing research has remained focused on urban centers, designated heritage sites, or areas of high tourist density (Shefer, 2021; Silverman and Ruggles, 2007; García-Hernández and Gravari-Barbas, 2025). Peripheral spaces—where memory is fragmented, identity remains unsettled, and communities are often excluded from planning—remain underexplored in contemporary heritage studies (Chirikure et al., 2010; Escobar, 2001). This highlights the growing need to reconceptualize peri-urban areas as informal memory spaces—where heritage may not be institutionally recognized, yet continues to exist through embodied, everyday practices.

In Vietnam, despite increasing policy attention to heritage conservation over the past decade, research has largely concentrated on nationally designated sites or heritage-mainstreaming programs within rural development initiatives (Nguyễn et al., 2019; Tuyên, 2023). Such approaches tend to be administrative and technical in nature, lacking theoretical depth on memory, power, and participation. Meanwhile, peri-urban areas such as Hoai Duc—facing rapid urbanization, resettlement, and the breakdown of traditional community structures—have rarely been considered as heritage spaces. A few recent studies have begun to address this gap: Nguyen et al. (2020) examined changing perceptions of agricultural land and community memory; Ali et al. (2025) highlighted the vulnerability and precariousness of livelihoods in urban peripheries, while Chen (2024) emphasized the fragility of community memory spaces in transitional heritage zones; and the case of Vuon Chuoi (Nguyen et al., 2024) illustrated a disconnect between legal frameworks and lived memory practices.

Building on this context, this study approaches Hoai Duc as an unrecognized yet memory-rich heritage space—where the community is not merely a policy object but a capable agent in defining, negotiating, and organizing cultural memory amid social transformation. This approach aims both to address an empirical gap in Vietnamese peri-urban heritage studies and to engage broader global debates on heritage as a symbolic, ethical, and social practice in which community capability plays a central role (Gilligan, 1993; Tronto, 2013; Ireland et al., 2025).

Accordingly, the article raises three central research questions: (1) How do local communities in peri-urban areas such as Hoai Duc negotiate heritage values amid urbanization and spatial restructuring? (2) In what forms—both symbolic and material—does participation manifest within informal conservation practices? (3) Can heritage be reconstructed from fragmented, disrupted memory and experiences of loss? If so, what roles do embodied knowledge—skills, gestures, and ritual practices transmitted through physical performance and lived interaction rather than written codification (Gilligan, 1993; Jiménez-Esquinas, 2025). In Hoai Duc, older women’s instruction on lighting incense or narrating village history during communal gatherings exemplifies this form of knowledge and ethics of care play in this process?

These questions are addressed through an ethnographic approach combining social phenomenology, using a case study in Hoai Duc—where boundaries between memory and reality, community and policy, conservation and development are continuously negotiated and reconfigured. Based on this foundation, the study proposes the CHD (Community–Heritage–Development) model as a three-dimensional critical framework—not to offer a technical formula, but to open theoretical space for understanding heritage as a co-created, contested, and incomplete process. While grounded in the context of Hoai Duc, this model has the potential to inform similarly situated contexts across Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa—where community, memory, and development remain fragmented in prevailing governance paradigms.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Over the past two decades, cultural heritage research has shifted away from purely technical or administrative paradigms towards more complex analyses that encompass social, political, emotional, and ethical dimensions. This evolution has occurred amid global processes of urbanization, postcolonial transformation, and identity contestation—where heritage values are no longer static entities preserved by institutions but dynamic sites of negotiation among actors, memories, and power relations (Chakrabarty, 2000; Mbembe, 2001; Mignolo, 2009). Most existing models continue to operate through top-down governance logics, where heritage is defined by experts and states, with insufficient attention to community meanings and symbolic practices (Smith, 2006; Kong, 2011).

Concepts such as “heritage as discourse” (Smith, 2006) and “everyday heritage” (Ireland et al., 2025) have challenged the conventional understanding of heritage as material preservation or authenticity. Heritage is no longer confined to what is labeled or officially recognized; it is embodied in daily actions, fragmented memories, objects, rituals, and even silence—where non-verbal expressions can constitute a form of political resistance (Spivak, 2023; Tilley, 2006). Intangible heritage, likewise, operates as a medium of memory transmission—through music, gestures, and embodied ritual sequences rather than formal discourse (Tran, 2025). Some emerging approaches also emphasize the resilience of heritage communities as models of social endurance—where identity is not merely preserved but actively remade through daily practices (Fabbricatti et al., 2020).

A growing body of critical literature has examined the relationship between heritage and community. In critiques of top-down conservation models, communities are no longer treated as passive recipients or “beneficiaries” but as cultural agents capable of defining, negotiating, and resisting (Latour, 2005; Delanty, 2011; de la Bellacasa, 2011). Waterton and Smith (2010) revealed how policy discourses often misrecognize communities. Moreover, recent research shows that even “authorised participation” is politically structured—where community roles are externally defined, weakening their co-creative agency (Pastor Pérez and Colomer, 2024).

Within postcolonial scholarship, Escobar (2001) and Larkin (2013) have illustrated how vernacular practices and infrastructural life can subvert modernist impositions, enabling plural heritage forms. Similarly, Labadi (2013) and Logan (2012) critique UNESCO’s global value frameworks for failing to account for locally embedded affective meanings. These approaches not only question global institutional authority but also show how fractured or wounded memories can become heritage through community participation and affective engagement (Silverman and Ruggles, 2007; Tronto, 2013, 2020).

In Vietnam, research has largely focused on three areas: historical-artistic value assessments, technical restoration, and linking heritage with rural development policies (Nguyễn et al., 2019; Tuyền, 2023). However, these studies often remain descriptive or technical, lacking theoretical frameworks to explain value conflicts, spatial symbolism, or identity formation amid urbanization. The case of Vuon Chuoi (Nguyen et al., 2024) demonstrated institutional failure, where legal systems could not protect community memory against development projects. Recent mixed-method studies in Hanoi’s peri-urban areas have analyzed how communities adapt livelihoods and reorganize social structures (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Yet, peri-urban zones—where tradition and modernity collide—have rarely been approached as living heritage spaces. Intergenerational conflicts, symbolic contestations, or the roles of semi-authoritative actors such as festival committees and elders remain insufficiently theorized (Waterton and Dittmer, 2014; Woodhead, 2023). Meanwhile, international research has argued that urban peripheries should not be seen as mere satellites but as contested spaces where memory and power are negotiated through informal, often counter-institutional forms (García-Hernández and Gravari-Barbas, 2025). Classifications of heritage governance models—from community-led to state-controlled—offer valuable insights into operational regimes on the ground (Zhang et al., 2024a).

A critical gap remains in research that combines quantitative methods with in-depth ethnography to trace the multilayered role of community—not merely as ritual participants or survey subjects but as bearers of embodied knowledge, ethics of care, and community capability in shaping heritage meanings (Gilligan, 1993; Harrison, 2013). Questions such as “Who has the right to define heritage?”, “Is silence a political form of expression?”, or “Can heritage emerge from broken memories and wounded experiences?” require a flexible, reflexive, and interdisciplinary analytical framework.

Within this context, the present study approaches Hoai Duc’s peri-urban area as a living heritage space—where communities are no longer policy recipients but cultural agents capable of resistance, negotiation, and meaning-making. This approach not only resonates with conditions in developing countries—where transplanting Western heritage governance models often proves counterproductive—but also contributes to expanding the global theoretical landscape on heritage as a social process. In this process, ethics, materiality, symbolism, and memory intertwine in daily practices, forming the epistemic foundation for proposing the CHD (Community–Heritage–Development) framework. It is from this foundation that the study connects heritage conflicts in Vietnam’s urban peripheries to international discourses on community agency and memory infrastructures in postcolonial urbanization.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Theoretical Framework**

In recent decades, the field of heritage studies has shifted from object-based and technical approaches toward critical perspectives that foreground communities, indigenous knowledge, and the socio-political dimensions of heritage governance (Hightower, 2024; Ireland et al., 2025; Zheng, 2025). Heritage is no longer conceptualized as a neutral, objective entity transmitted intact over time, but as the outcome of ongoing processes of negotiation,

interpretation, and contestation embedded in everyday social life (Smith, 2006; Waterton and Smith, 2010; Jiménez-Esquinas, 2025). Within this paradigm, conservation becomes the active construction of spaces of memory and symbolic meaning through complex and often disrupted social relations (Kayikci and Sehlkoglou, 2025; Gough et al., 2024).

At the center of this process lies the community—not as a homogeneous or consensual body as policy documents often assume, but as a stratified field of tensions shaped by generation, kinship, migration history, and symbolic capital (Alves et al., 2016; Woodhead, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024b). Insights from the Hoai Duc case confirm that participation may manifest as ritual compliance, selective silence, or withdrawal, which—when read through *ethics of care* (Tronto, 2013, 2020) and *symbolic resistance* (Spivak, 2023)—can be understood as deliberate strategies for protecting moral and cultural integrity in contexts of unequal power. Such practices resonate with other Global South heritage settings, where informal or embodied participation sustains cultural meaning outside formal governance channels (Djabarouti, 2024; Tenzer, 2024).

The CHD (Community–Heritage–Development) model is proposed not as a standardized governance framework, but as a counter-concept designed to expose assumptions embedded in dominant models—such as the presumption of internal consensus, the fixed sanctity of heritage, or the inherent positivity of development (Bathla, 2025; Mascaro, 2024). In this framework, *epistemic disobedience* (Mignolo, 2009) becomes a crucial analytical lens, reframing silent dissent, private rituals, and everyday heritage acts as legitimate counter-hegemonic knowledge practices (Chen, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024b).

Accordingly, “Community” is redefined as a layered, multi-centered field where representational legitimacy is unevenly distributed. “Heritage” is treated as a fragmented infrastructure of memory— affective, political, and contested—where even non-verbal acts (e.g., refusal to participate in state-led rituals) signal negotiated value systems (Kayikci and Sehlkoglou, 2025; Gough et al., 2024). “Development” is understood as a disruptive force that reconfigures spatial, ritual, and symbolic orders, often triggering adaptive or resistant responses such as delay, avoidance, and selective engagement (Ali et al., 2025; Molho, 2025).

Rather than isolating these domains, CHD situates them in a space of continuous conflict and co-dependence, making visible the relational asymmetries and ethical negotiations that underpin peri-urban heritage. This aligns Hoai Duc’s experience with broader postcolonial debates on heritage, where community agency is enacted not solely through speech or policy participation, but through the embodied, ethical, and often understated performances that keep memory alive in contested urban margins (Mandache, 2024; Kayikci and Sehlkoglou, 2025).

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamic structure of the CHD framework. Rather than existing in isolation, each element interweaves through specific social situations—where memory, power, and participation remain in states of flux and negotiation.



Figure 1. The dynamic structure of the CHD framework.

The CHD (Community–Heritage–Development) framework conceptualizes peri-urban heritage as a contested and unstable infrastructure of memory. “Community” is a stratified, multi-centered field shaped by generation, kinship, gender, migration history, and symbolic capital. “Heritage” is a fragmented memory system where rituals, silence, and embodied practices constitute symbolic participation —non-verbal, affective, and ritualized acts, such as preparing offerings, guiding children in worship, or maintaining altars, that preserve heritage value without formal decision-making authority (Waterton and Dittmer, 2014)—interpreted through the lenses of ethics of care

(Tronto, 2013, 2020) and symbolic resistance (Spivak, 2023). “Development” is a disruptive force that reconfigures cultural spaces and ritual orders, prompting adaptive or resistant responses such as delay, avoidance, and selective engagement. The intersections of these domains illustrate the role of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) in sustaining alternative knowledge systems and negotiating value regimes in the Global South.

## **Research Methods**

The methodological approach of this study is based on the understanding that cultural heritage is not merely a set of tangible entities to be preserved, but a socially constructed and negotiated process among multiple actors, in which the community plays a central role. As heritage is no longer regarded as a fixed object but as a living and continuously re-enacted cultural practice, the study calls for methodological tools more flexible than conventional technical models. Accordingly, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach to capture both the breadth of the phenomenon through quantitative surveys and the cultural-social depth through in-depth interviews and field observations. The data collection process was conducted from September 2023 to May 2024, including surveys, interviews, and field observations at key cultural events. The methodological design also aimed to build a practical model applicable to cultural urban planning in peri-urban areas, with a focus on integrating community roles into conservation processes.

### ***Research site, sampling criteria, and survey design***

The selected case is Hoai Duc District, a representative peri-urban area of Hanoi that preserves a rich system of heritage—including village temples, pagodas, and traditional festivals—while undergoing intense spatial restructuring since the 2000s. The heritage system here is not immune to the dynamics of land markets, industrial zoning, and urban expansion. The intersection of heritage and development forms the premise for rethinking the community’s role in specific field conditions.

A total of 312 quantitative questionnaires were distributed across 10 communes with high heritage density and rapid urbanization, including Duong Lieu, Kim Chung, Son Dong, An Khanh, and La Phu. The sampling criteria were stratified by demographics and occupation to reflect diversity in age, gender, education, socio-economic status, and ties to traditional village spaces. Key groups included: the elderly (over 60), working-age residents (25–45), local youth, retirees, small business owners, commune cultural officers, and a proportion of students. Ensuring a sufficiently broad and stratified sample enabled the identification of meaningful social correlations while avoiding the common pitfall of treating the community as a homogeneous entity.

### ***Data collection: Content and instruments***

The questionnaire was semi-structured, not only measuring behaviors (e.g., frequency of participation in restoration, festivals, donations) but also probing perceptions of heritage value, emotional attachment to cultural spaces, personal views on community and government responsibility, and reactions to negative phenomena such as inappropriate restorations or commercialization. Each item was piloted and adjusted based on feedback from the survey team to ensure alignment with local language and lived realities.

Parallel to the broad survey, the study conducted 15 in-depth interviews with individuals closely connected to local heritage. These included temple custodians, festival organizers, shamans, pagoda abbots, commune cultural officers, and elderly residents in traditional villages. The interviews were open-ended and flexible, allowing participants to express their opinions, memories, grievances, or hopes regarding the current heritage situation. Each interview lasted 40–60 minutes, was recorded and fully transcribed for subsequent content analysis.

In addition, field observations were conducted at several cultural events, such as the Kim Hoang village temple festival, the full moon ceremony at Linh Tien Pagoda, and everyday practices such as worship and restoration work at heritage sites. These notes captured not just behaviors but also spatial atmospheres, ritual arrangements, and social interactions around heritage—elements often missed in quantitative surveys.

All participants were clearly informed of the research objectives, data confidentiality rights, and their right to withdraw at any time. The data collection and processing adhered to ethical standards in sociological research, internally reviewed by the research team according to institutional guidelines.

### ***Data analysis: From descriptive statistics to interpretive coding***

Quantitative data were processed using SPSS 26.0 through descriptive analysis, reliability testing (Cronbach’s Alpha for Likert-scale clusters), and cross-tabulations by age, gender, occupation, and education. Some correlation tests were conducted to examine the relationships between attitudes, perceptions, and participation in heritage activities. While the goal was not to predict or model quantitatively, these steps allowed identification of significant patterns—for example, the relationship between age and motivation to join festivals or between education level and evaluations of restoration efforts. These were exploratory in nature, with no use of factor analysis (EFA) or complex regression, serving mainly to inform discourse trajectories in the qualitative analysis.

In qualitative processing, the team adopted an interpretive content analysis approach, focusing on identifying culturally and socially meaningful themes rather than simply counting keyword frequency. Each transcript was read multiple times to extract meaning units reflecting the participants’ experiences, views, or emotions. Recurrent signs, discourse patterns, or salient conflicts were marked and initially coded.

The coding process was iterative rather than linear: initial codes were reviewed, regrouped, divided, or reorganized into broader thematic clusters. These clusters reflected not just information content but also latent value systems—such as the notion of authenticity, memories of the pre-urbanized village, or feelings of helplessness over the cementification of spiritual spaces.

In the final stage, central themes emerged not as a checklist but as large semantic fields embodying the social tensions shaping community-heritage interaction: tensions between preservation and change, collective and individual, memory and planning. NVivo 12 was used not as a thinking substitute but as a tool to visualize relationships among codes, review analytic logic, and compare expressions across communes with different social characteristics.

**Reliability and transferability of the research design**

Triangulating three data sources—surveys, interviews, and observations—allowed cross-verification and reduced collection bias. Furthermore, detailed presentation of sampling criteria, survey content, analytical tools, and qualitative-quantitative processing protocols ensured the study’s replicability in similar peri-urban contexts. This is increasingly emphasized in international scholarly forums to enhance research reliability and generalizability, especially in developing country settings.

To verify the transferability of the CHD model, preliminary surveys and theoretical comparisons were conducted in two other peri-urban localities: Hoc Mon (Ho Chi Minh City) and Huong Tra (Thua Thien Hue). Although in-depth investigations were not conducted, primary data and local documents revealed striking similarities: community fragmentation, symbolic conflict, and tensions between memory spaces and development pressures.

In Hoc Mon, rapid industrialization has shrunk many spiritual shrines, while new residents—mostly urban migrants—show limited attachment to traditional rituals. In Huong Tra, local spiritual heritage faces administrative intervention from the state, causing conflicts between indigenous kinship systems and bureaucratic control. In both cases, informal participation—such as rituals, storytelling, or shrine upkeep—remains central but often overlooked in policy.

These comparisons affirm the CHD model’s relevance to Vietnam’s peri-urban areas, where communities are heterogeneous, memories fragmented, and cultural symbols constantly contested. Despite site-specific differences in lineage structure, urbanization levels, and heritage systems, foundational dynamics—contested representation, embodied knowledge, and ethical practice—persist. This affirms the CHD model’s potential for expansion to Southeast and South Asian borderlands, where indigenous communities are negotiating heritage under uncertain and informal urbanization conditions. **Table 1** compares the three localities to illustrate the CHD model’s empirical applicability.

**Table 1.** Comparative peri urban areas for testing and extending the CHD model

Peri-urban area	Heritage characteristics	Principal conflict	Community structure
Hoai Duc (Hanoi)	Village communal house, pagoda, ancient village festivals	Commercialization – exclusion of the community	Village elder – traditional festival committee
Hoc Mon (Ho Chi Minh City)	Temple, insurgent-era communal house, folk beliefs	Industrial development – loss of ritual space	Inner-city migrants – youth disengagement
Huong Tra (Hue)	Religious heritage, temple-shrine festivals	Administrative intervention – clashes with indigenous residents	Clan system – strong lineage council

Including these comparative cases not only facilitates testing the transferability of the analytical framework, but also contributes to developing a highly localized heritage theory that nevertheless engages in equal dialogue with contemporary international scholarship.

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

The relationships between community and heritage do not emerge as static entities, but are constructed through multiple layers of interaction—from awareness, communication, education, and emotional attachment, to participatory ritual behaviors and the value tensions arising during urbanization. Drawing on three data sources—surveys, in-depth interviews, and field observation—this section analyzes four major result groups: degree of heritage attachment, community participation behaviors, value conflicts in heritage spaces, and policy expectations

from the perspective of local residents. These analyses not only reflect general patterns, but also highlight variations by generation, gender, and degree of village attachment.

### Community Awareness and Attachment to Heritage

Survey results indicate that most residents maintain a certain emotional connection with their village heritage system. Approximately 74.3 % of respondents agreed that “heritage is an important part of the spiritual life of local people,” with the highest agreement (85.7 %) among those aged 50 and above. However, this level of attachment is uneven across generations, as only 41.2 % of respondents under 30 believed “I have a responsibility to preserve the heritage of my hometown.”

While symbolic attachment decreases, actual participation in heritage-related activities remains fairly active. **Table 2** clearly presents the common types of participation and the proportions of residents who have engaged in each.

**Table 2.** Residents’ participation in heritage preservation activities

Activity	Participation rate (%)
Contributing to monument restoration	62.5
Attending festivals	58.0
Participating in organizing festivals/cultural events	47.3
Not participating in any activities	14.6

Qualitative responses from in-depth interviews clarify this picture further. Mr. H., an elderly resident of Son Dong, shared:

“I grew up in the village communal house, shared festival meals, sang at the communal house gate. But now the youngsters don’t come to the communal house; they go to the shopping mall.” (Mr. H., elderly resident, Son Dong commune, in-depth interview, 2023)

This statement reflects not only a generational gap, but also implies a rupture in the symbolic cultural system occurring alongside living space restructuring.

Indicators related to awareness and attachment were measured using a 5-point Likert scale and reliability tested via Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.812, demonstrating high reliability for items measuring spiritual roles of heritage, personal responsibility, and cultural attachment.

### Community Participation Behaviors and Roles in Heritage Preservation

Interview data were analyzed using NVivo, following a three-level coding model: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Excerpts such as “*I contribute money but have no right*” or “*the red tile roof looks lifeless*” were coded under themes like “inequitable participation rights,” “heritage as an object of intervention,” and “ritual spaces being commercialized.” These field accounts give empirical weight to concepts central to the CHD framework. For example, the withdrawal from newly restored spaces without public consultation, as voiced by Ms. Q. in Duong Lieu (“*I contribute money but I have no right. They invite bids, build it, then allow villagers to worship. No one asks villagers what to keep and what to remove.*”), illustrates *soft disobedience*—a form of ethical non-cooperation consistent with *symbolic resistance* (Spivak, 2023).

Qualitative analysis reveals that the three CHD dimensions—Community, Heritage, Development—intersect in specific contexts where stratification, dissent, and imposed change converge. **Table 3a** systematizes these situations, showing how lineage hierarchy (“*She’s skilled but not invited because she’s not old line*”), undesired restoration (“*I no longer go to the communal house; it lost its old atmosphere*”), and administrative outsourcing without consent (“*They rebuilt it like new; we just watched*”) map directly onto the theoretical framing. Such expressions embody what this study terms an *unstable infrastructure of memory*, where relationships between community, heritage, and development are continually re-negotiated under conditions of symbolic inequality—aligning with *ethics of care* perspectives that view withdrawal and silence as active modes of value preservation (Tronto, 2013, 2020).

Quantitatively, 62.5 % of respondents had contributed to restoration in the past five years, 58 % had attended village festivals, and 47.3 % had engaged in event organization. Yet 26.1 % felt that current restoration was “not transparent” and “lacked public voice.” Such figures, when read alongside interview narratives like Mr. H.’s lament that “*now the youngsters don’t come to the communal house; they go to the shopping mall,*” confirm that participation often remains material or ceremonial rather than decisional.

**Table 3a.** Situations of memory negotiation and soft resistance within the CHD framework

Analytical dimension	Field situation	Expressed claim	NVivo coding
Community	Lineage hierarchy and residence affect festival participation	“She’s skilled but not invited because she’s not old-line.”	Soft exclusion – symbolic status
Heritage	Withdrawal from festival after undesired restoration	“I no longer go to the communal house; it lost its old atmosphere.”	Symbolic defiance – deliberate silence
Heritage	Holding private ancestral rite, stopping worship at new house	No direct statement, but changed ritual behavior	Non-verbal memory negotiation
Development	Administrative process – outsourcing without community consent	“They rebuilt it like new; we just watched.”	Imposed development – loss of community control
Community reaction	Avoidance, delay, selective apathy	“Soft resistance – ethical non-cooperation”	Soft resistance
CHD intersection	Dimensions interwoven, showing dynamic and covert conflicts	“Unstable memory – informal agency”	—

From these situations, it is clear that community agency does not manifest through overt speech or official presence, but often operates through non-verbal, symbolic, and emotional forms—especially selective silence, withdrawal, and private ritual acts. These expressions reflect the state of an *unstable infrastructure of memory*, wherein relationships between community, heritage, and development are continuously re-negotiated—morally and knowledgeably profound.

When asked about specific participatory behaviors, 62.5 % of respondents had contributed to restoration in the past five years, 58 % had attended village festivals, and 47.3 % had been involved in organizational or logistical work for traditional cultural activities. However, 26.1 % believed current restoration was “not transparent” and “lacked public voice.” The interview group recorded many critical opinions on “restoration appearing like new construction” and “concrete over-coating of communal houses,” notably from contributors. Ms. Q. in Duong Lieu commune candidly stated:

“I contribute money but I have no right. They invite bids, build it, then allow villagers to worship. No one asks villagers what to keep and what to remove.” (Ms. Q., resident, Duong Lieu commune, in-depth interview, 2024)

Such accounts clearly indicate that the community’s role remains limited to material contributions, unrecognized as decision-making or cultural value creation agents. **Table 3b** summarizes the three-level NVivo coding structure, showing main thematic dimensions illustrated by interview excerpts.

**Table 3b.** NVivo three level qualitative coding structure

Coding level	Main code	Sub-theme/specific topic	Illustrative excerpt
Open coding	Participation rights	Inequality in contribution and decision-making	“I contribute money but have no right. They invite bids... then worship.”
Open coding	Symbolic value	Loss of identity/spirit of the communal house	“The red-tile roof looks lifeless.”
Open coding	Negative reactions	Misguided restoration/commercialization	“Restoration like building anew,” “concreting over communal house”
Axial coding	Heritage intervention	Ritual space modernization	“They said uniformization for cleanliness, but it looks like a restaurant not a communal house.”
Axial coding	Youth attitude	Indifference toward heritage	“Now the youngsters don’t come to the communal house; they go to the shopping mall.”
Axial coding	Community participation	Material participation predominates	“We can contribute money, but no one asks villagers.”
Selective coding	Limited community role	Not recognized as cultural agents	“Having a heritage site doesn’t preserve culture. You need someone to tell the story, pass it to children.”
Selective coding	Value conflict	Between preservation and modernization	43.8 % opposed physical changes; 39.4 % approved

To clarify gender and generational dimensions in heritage participation structure, researchers further analyzed interview segments by speaker gender and generational group (under 30, middle-aged, elderly). The results show that most statements related to ritual practice, emotional attachment, and knowledge transmission came from older women—who are typically absent in formal heritage governance structures.

This confirms that embodied knowledge is not abstract but tied to specific, marginalized subjects in terms of gender and age. Those who “cook offerings,” “guide children in worship,” or “tell village stories” are the deepest memory keepers, yet are often excluded from “participation” mechanisms. **Table 4a** compiles representative excerpts by gender–generation as evidence of symbolic stratification in heritage space.

**Table 4a.** Gender–generation coding and embodied knowledge

Social group	Characteristic statement	Manifested form of knowledge	Illustrative quote
Elderly women	Teaching rituals, cooking offerings, organizing altars	Embodied knowledge – ritual practices	“I only teach grandchildren how to light incense, call each prayer group.”
Elderly men	Preserving village stories, recounting communal house history	Symbolic knowledge – collective memory	“I recount stories of Kim village’s communal house from war days until now.”
Middle-aged women	Critiquing incorrect restoration, preserving traditional objects	Ethical knowledge – reflexivity	“Seeing them rebuild with new bricks, I don’t want to enter and worship anymore.”
Youth	Detached from rituals, emphasizing material convenience	Fragmented knowledge	“Now we go to shopping malls; I know nothing about communal houses.”

**Table 4a** clearly shows that knowledge distribution is uneven and closely aligned with gender and generation. Current policies’ emphasis on official voices inadvertently excludes individuals who strongly uphold heritage. This is also the crux of the CHD model, which emphasizes symbolic participation as a valid practice—where knowledge is maintained through bodily performance, memory, and repetitive ritual.

These coded data not only reflect community dissatisfaction, but also demonstrate how community members use silence and material behavior as political expression. Instead of direct dialogue, many choose not to go to the communal house, to contribute money but not speak—an intentional withdrawal. This raises questions about the limits of the notion of “participation” in heritage, which is often understood as speech or voting, while ignoring richly ethical and emotional symbolic forms. Approaches such as ethics of care (Tronto, 2013) and embodied knowledge (Halpern et al., 2022; Jones, 2023; Gilligan, 1993) allow us to view silence not as absence, but as a way of maintaining memory through body and daily practice. Residents, especially older individuals and women, may not decide restoration, but they are the keepers of ritual, cooking, and village storytelling—practices that sustain symbolic structures beyond formal policy.

From qualitative data, one can systematize the internal fragmentation dimensions in Hoai Duc community as shown in **Table 4b**, clarifying structural causes of symbolic conflicts and participatory limitations.

**Table 4b.** Internal fragmentation dimensions in Hoai Duc community

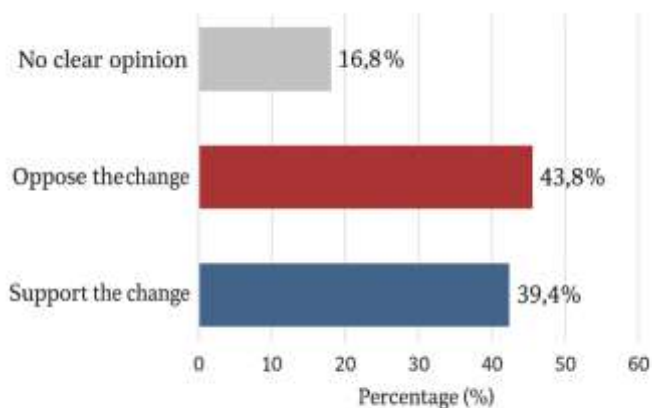
Fragmentation dimension	Expression from qualitative data	Consequence for heritage
Generation	Elderly emphasize sacredness, youth prioritize convenience	Rupture in collective memory
Social status	Festival committee has decision control; ordinary residents excluded	Heritage commercialization
Lineage	Some lineages favored for festival roles	Cultural discourse monopoly
Residency	New residents less attached, don’t participate in festivals	Loss of spatial continuity

These data indicate that community participation cannot be understood simply as binary participation or non-participation. It must be placed within contexts of deep social fragmentation: status, generation, lineage, and residency together form axes of inequality shaping the capacities for participation, expression, and symbolic control. It is within these stratifications that value conflicts—seemingly about materials or design—reveal their cultural and symbolic depth, as will be further analyzed next.

### Conflicts in Heritage Values and Emerging Living Spaces

Observations at various festivals and worship spaces also reveal tensions between two parallel value systems coexisting within the community. On one hand is the aspiration to “preserve the traditional village spirit,” “pass down the soul of the past,” while on the other is the pressure to modernize spaces according to new urban standards. At the Kim Hoang village communal house festival, the replacement of the original ancient roof tiles with faux-antique red panels sparked considerable controversy. Ms. P., a commune official, emphasized the need for “harmonization to create a cleaner, more beautiful landscape,” whereas Mr. H., an elderly resident, asserted that such changes “strip the communal house of its soul” (In-depth interview, 2024, unpublished data).

The divergent reactions to heritage interventions are clearly illustrated in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Agreement with modernizing heritage spaces (%) [Community survey in 6 communes of Hoai Duc District, Hanoi (2024), N = 312].

According to the survey results, 39.4% of respondents supported the statement that “heritage spaces should be adapted to fit urban planning,” while 43.8% opposed it. This reveals internal community divisions in how heritage value is defined—an especially critical issue in peri-urban areas undergoing rapid transformation.

**Community Expectations and Policy Proposals for Heritage Preservation**

Despite existing dissatisfaction and distrust, the local community is far from indifferent to preservation, restoration, and conservation processes. Most residents still expressed a strong desire to participate formally and responsibly. They proposed not only financial transparency mechanisms but also the right to voice opinions on restoration directions, spatial usage, and cultural transmission to younger generations. 71.2% of surveyed individuals agreed that “villagers should have a formal role in heritage-related decision-making.” The most frequently mentioned proposals included increasing transparency in the use of community contributions, organizing community consultations before restoration projects, and retaining the advisory role of elders in festivals and worship activities. These expectations are summarized in [Table 5a](#) and [Table 5b](#).

**Table 5a.** Community proposals for heritage policy

Proposal from residents	Selection rate (%)
Community consultation before restoration	73.1
Financial transparency	68.4
Community representatives in management boards	57.2
Maintain elders’ role in festivals	51.7
Organize youth training programs	38.9

**Table 5b.** Reliability testing of indicator clusters (Cronbach’s alpha) (SPSS 26.0 analysis from Hoai Duc community survey, 2024)

Indicator cluster	Number of items	Cronbach’s alpha
Awareness of heritage role	4	0.812
Community attachment	3	0.768
Responsibility in preservation	5	0.843

To deepen the quantitative analysis, the study conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on three indicator clusters: degree of heritage attachment, preservation participation behavior, and policy expectations. The results showed that the observed variables in each group loaded well onto a single factor (factor loading > 0.6), confirming internal consistency. Notably, the “preservation responsibility” group had a high correlation with the variable “desire for village representatives in heritage management boards” (factor loading = 0.79), suggesting that participation behavior reflects not only ritual involvement but also a clear aspiration to shape policy.

Based on the EFA results, a simple linear regression was run between the scale of “emotional attachment to heritage” and “support for formal participation mechanisms,” yielding a statistically significant outcome ( $R^2 = 0.382$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This supports the argument that cultural attachment substantively influences residents’ socio-political behaviors, beyond personal sentiment. This relationship will be further explored through multivariate regression in future research, with the aim of constructing a causal model describing conditions for effective community participation in heritage preservation.

These quantitative findings reveal a clear relationship between emotion, behavior, and policy aspirations, but ethnographic data remains irreplaceable in revealing the social dynamics beneath these figures. Many in-depth interviews highlight the paradox between symbolic attachment and a sense of exclusion. Mr. K., a village head in An Khanh, emphasized: “Having a relic doesn’t mean preserving culture. You need people who can tell stories, pass them on to the next generation, and provide space for villagers to organize—not just build and then lock it up.” (Mr. K., village head, An Khanh commune, in-depth interview, 2024)

This account expresses not only a personal opinion, but an embodied knowledge stream: community memory does not reside in static objects, but in lived practices—storytelling, worship, cooking, and teaching rituals. These knowledge forms often fall outside the scope of quantitative metrics but form the bedrock of meaningful participation. Here, embodied knowledge and ethics of care are not abstract concepts but living structures enacted across generations—especially by women and the elderly.

When cross-referenced with quantitative data, it becomes clear that those with the highest emotional attachment also expressed the strongest desire to participate in planning, monitoring, and cultural transmission—even if they were absent from official mechanisms. This highlights the need for a hybrid analytical framework: statistics help identify trends, while ethnography uncovers symbolic logic and moral structure—those undercurrents through which communities “quietly” sustain heritage in daily life.

## DISCUSSION

The research findings not only present a vivid portrait of community involvement in heritage preservation in Hanoi’s peri-urban areas, but also raise profound theoretical questions regarding international models that currently dominate policy and global academic discourse. This section deconstructs the conflicts, implicit expressions, and discursive strategies deployed by communities, situated within a cross-cultural comparative framework, ultimately proposing a heritage model attuned to the realities of developing countries—particularly from a Global South perspective.

### Heritage as a Fragmented Social Field

The findings demonstrate that the CHD framework’s core concepts—such as *soft disobedience*, *unstable infrastructure of memory*, *symbolic resistance*, *ethics of care*, and *embodied knowledge*—are not abstract constructs but are anchored in observable behaviors, coded themes, and measurable trends. These concepts emerge from lived practices and survey patterns that reveal how communities navigate tensions between heritage conservation, development pressures, and internal stratifications.

**Table 6** synthesizes these connections, mapping each theoretical concept to specific NVivo codes, field evidence, and where applicable, related survey findings.

**Table 6.** Mapping of theoretical concepts to specific NVivo codes, field evidence, and where applicable, related survey findings

Theoretical concept	NVivo code(s)	Field evidence	Related survey finding
Soft disobedience (ethical non-cooperation)	Soft resistance – ethical non-cooperation	“I contribute money but have no right...” (Ms. Q., Duong Lieu commune)	26.1 % reported restoration “not transparent”
Unstable infrastructure of memory	Unstable memory – informal agency	“I no longer go to the communal house; it lost its old atmosphere.”	43.8 % opposed modernizing heritage spaces
Symbolic resistance	Symbolic defiance – deliberate silence	Holding private ancestral rites instead of participating in communal worship	n/a
Ethics of care	Embodied knowledge – ritual practices	“I only teach grandchildren how to light incense, call each prayer group.”	Older women absent from formal governance
Embodied knowledge	Ethical knowledge – reflexivity	“Seeing them rebuild with new bricks, I don’t want to enter and worship anymore.”	n/a

This integrative view makes clear that each theoretical dimension of CHD is substantiated by grounded evidence. For example, *soft disobedience* manifests through concrete statements like Ms. Q.’s refusal to equate financial contribution with acceptance of imposed restoration, while the *unstable infrastructure of memory* is reflected in both individual testimonies and survey splits over modernization (43.8 % oppose vs. 39.4 % support). *Symbolic resistance* and *ethics of care* further highlight how deliberate withdrawal, private ritual, and gendered knowledge-keeping act as strategies for sustaining heritage values beyond formal governance structures.

By explicitly linking these concepts to coded themes and empirical indicators, the CHD model is reinforced as an operational analytical framework, capable of tracing how intangible, embodied, and often understated practices shape the contested terrain of peri-urban heritage.

### **Critical Comparison with International Models: The Crisis of Western Universals**

UNESCO, ICCROM, and the “heritage as discourse” model (Smith, 2006) often imply that communities are coherent units capable of consensus and meaningful engagement in governance processes. However, Vietnamese data reveal the opposite: empowerment does not equate to actual power—and participation can obscure rather than resolve conflicts. Vietnam’s peri-urban communities are fragmented by generation, status, and migration history—leading to symbolic exclusion, hidden conflicts, and contested representation. Uncritically applying CBHM models risks producing “representational fictions,” where real voices are masked by surface consensus.

Regional examples reinforce this critique. In China, heritage-linked rural development tends to be top-down and processual rather than community-initiated, producing effects similar to those documented in Hoai Duc—selective withdrawal, symbolic dissent, and the prioritization of spectacle over memory (Mascaro, 2024). In South Korea, participation is often transformed into national cultural symbolism, weakening local negotiation and rendering village-level agency largely ceremonial. These East Asian reflections show that the concept of “community” cannot remain invariant and unified, but must be approached as a historically contingent, conflictual social field.

Comparable tensions are evident in other Global South contexts. In Zimbabwe, Chirikure et al. (2010) documented how heritage site governance was complicated by lineage politics and differential access to ritual authority, a pattern resonating with the stratification mapped in [Table 4a](#) and [Table 4b](#). In India, Bathla (2025) found that temple-town redevelopment schemes displaced ritual practices to peripheral spaces—functionally creating what the CHD model calls *unstable infrastructures of memory*. Mandache (2024) showed that in Brazil, younger generations often disengage from local heritage rituals in favor of modern leisure spaces, a dynamic that parallels Hoai Duc’s survey split (43.8 % opposed modernization vs. 39.4 % in favor).

Recent scholarship underscores that these issues are not geographically isolated but structurally embedded. Jiménez-Esquinas (2025) provides a feminist critique of heritage regimes, highlighting how gendered labor and emotional work—such as those of older women in Hoai Duc—are systematically undervalued. Zheng (2025) identifies a “paradox of heritage participation” in Southeast Asia, where the rhetoric of inclusion coexists with persistent structural exclusion, mirroring the NVivo-coded patterns of symbolic resistance and ethical non-cooperation. Kayikci and Sehlkoglul (2025) explore “heritage in the margins,” showing how everyday acts and informal custodianship sustain cultural value outside formal governance—a principle at the heart of the CHD model.

These comparative cases collectively demand a reexamination of the theoretical premises behind existing heritage governance frameworks. As Spivak (2023) reminds us, representation cannot be divorced from power structures and always risks replacing subaltern voices with imposed discourses (representation vs. re-presentation). Chakrabarty (2000) argues that all attempts to theorize the non-West are filtered through the provincializing logic of Western modernity—a limit that must be deconstructed. Similarly, Mbembe (2001) analyzes how symbols and political rituals in postcolonial states are not mere extensions of sovereignty, but performative mechanisms of internalized power. Meanwhile, Mignolo (2009) emphasizes “epistemic disobedience” as a necessary strategy against the global monoculture of knowledge.

By situating Hoai Duc’s findings within this wider landscape, the CHD model is not positioned as a technical fix, but as an operational lens for analyzing heritage as a battlefield of knowledge, memory, and power—where every concept must be disarmed and rebuilt from Global South experiences.

### **A Locally Embedded Community–Heritage–Development Model for the Global South**

Drawing from ethnographic analysis and theoretical dialogue, this study proposes a three-pillar model for developing-country contexts—where heritage does not operate as a stable institution but as a contested system that simultaneously generates memory and structures power relations:

*Community as a Stratified, Multi-centered Social Field:* Communities are not unified but composed of micro-power clusters—lineages, generations, old/new residents, women, ritual keepers. Participatory mechanisms must be designed based on recognizing these internal forces, not assuming a singular representative voice.

*Symbolic Participation as Legitimate Memory Practice:* Forms of presence such as silence, bodily practice, and ritual may convey deeper memory than speech or voting. Heritage is preserved not only through action, but through symbol, affect, and embodied repetition. Preservation policy must expand the definition of “participation” to include such symbolic forms.

*Heritage as a Site of Identity Conflict and Production:* Heritage is not a place to safeguard settled values but a space where memory is contested, values negotiated, and identity shaped through friction. Conflict is not a problem to avoid but a generative mechanism through which community identity is continuously reconstructed.

This three-pillar model (Figure 3) synthesizes the dynamics observed in the field. The proposed CHD (Community–Heritage–Development) framework, grounded in local contexts, is tailored for peri-urban areas in developing nations. Rather than treating heritage as a fixed entity to be preserved through institutional norms, this model views it as a contested space—where stratified community structures, embodied forms of participation, and identity-making through conflict interweave. It offers a bottom-up challenge to top-down heritage governance models currently in dominance.



**Figure 3.** The localized CHD model for peri-urban contexts in developing countries.

The Venn diagram below illustrates three core dimensions of grassroots heritage interaction: community as a stratified, multi-centered field; symbolic participation as a valid practice of memory; and heritage as a space where identity is shaped through conflict. The model reflects the fragmented, embodied, and continuously negotiated nature of heritage practices in transitional spaces.

Though designed as a counter-concept to question the stable assumptions of heritage governance, the CHD model extends beyond conceptual critique. It operates as a fieldwork interpretive tool—repositioning what may seem like disjointed disruptions across conservation, development, and community into readable and negotiable relations. CHD helps identify who is participating, who is excluded, and who negotiates through silence—thus exposing symbolic and ethical blind spots in current policies.

Rather than offering standardized action plans, this model creates space for lived practices—such as rituals organized by women, oral memory transmitted by elders, or the silent withdrawal of younger generations—to be recognized as intrinsic to heritage, not peripheral. CHD does not offer a “toolkit” or “deployment roadmap”; instead, it functions as an open theoretical device that allows reconfiguration of community–heritage–development relations in context-specific ways, with high sensitivity to symbolic inequality, social stratification, and embodied knowledge. Precisely by refusing to become formulaic, CHD achieves transferability—not by replication, but by evoking what has yet to be articulated.

## CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the internal dynamics through which local communities—specifically residents of Hoai Duc’s peri-urban areas—negotiate and reshape cultural heritage amid urban transformation. Contrary to

common assumptions in community-based heritage management (CBHM) models, which often envision the community as a unified subject capable of direct decision-making, this research reveals a more complex reality: communities are not homogeneous, voices are stratified, and participation manifests in symbolic, often non-verbal and informal forms.

Within such a space, the proposed CHD model does not aim to depict a balanced structure, but rather to define a new concept: *heritage as an unstable infrastructure of memory*—where community, development, and memory operate as conflicting yet interdependent forces. This concept extends Smith’s (2006) thesis on heritage as discourse and converses with Escobar’s (2001) insights on bottom-up localization of development knowledge. Heritage, then, is not something to be preserved, but something to be argued over. It is precisely within this zone of uncertainty that new life-forms, bottom-up sustainability strategies, and informal cultural structures can be recognized, reinforced, and expanded as forms of active political engagement by communities at the margins.

More importantly, the study sheds light on a blind spot in global heritage governance discourse: the presumed stability and unity of “community.” Current CHD (Community–Heritage–Development) models tend to assume these three components can function in harmonious alignment, while field data from Vietnam reveal deep misalignments, tensions, and antagonistic discourses. In the context of urbanization in developing countries, heritage is not merely an object or cultural emblem but a site of emotional force, power negotiation, and identity reconstitution.

Rather than reinforcing pre-defined models, this study proposes a different approach: viewing peri-urban community experience as theoretical material from which heritage can be redefined as a discursive process—where affective, non-verbal, and unstable expressions serve as entry points for understanding power, identity, and participation in the postcolonial present.

Practically, the research identifies key community conflicts and expectations—from feelings of exclusion in restoration decisions and mistrust in financial transparency, to the desire to affirm the roles of elders and younger generations in village cultural spaces. Through a combined quantitative and qualitative lens, this paper offers concrete, feasible recommendations tailored to local social structures—contributing to the operationalization of participatory preservation theory, which often remains abstract in global policy documents.

The CHD framework, while developed from the empirical realities of Hoai Duc’s peri-urban heritage, demonstrates analytical flexibility that extends well beyond the Vietnamese context. By explicitly integrating symbolic participation, embodied knowledge, and the dynamics of unstable infrastructures of memory, it offers a lens capable of diagnosing similar governance frictions in diverse Global South and postcolonial settings. Comparative parallels from Zimbabwe (Chirikure et al., 2010), India (Bathla, 2025), China (Mascaro, 2024), and Brazil (Mandache, 2024) show that community fragmentation, contested representation, and silent forms of resistance are recurring features in heritage governance under rapid socio-economic change. The inclusion of recent international scholarship (Jiménez-Esquinas, 2025; Zheng, 2025; Kayikci and Sehlkogl, 2025) positions CHD within contemporary global debates, ensuring that its conceptual contributions resonate with both local and international audiences. In this sense, CHD is not a fixed formula but a transferable analytical tool—designed to reveal and interpret the subtle negotiations of memory, power, and participation wherever heritage is entangled in uneven development and shifting cultural landscapes.

However, limitations in survey coverage and interview scope mean that the study’s conclusions may not fully represent other peri-urban settings in Vietnam or the broader Global South. Future comparative or cross-national research will be crucial in testing the transferability of this analytical framework, while advancing a theoretical approach that is both deeply localized and capable of dialoguing with global heritage governance discourses in contexts of postcolonialism and urban flux. The CHD model, therefore, holds potential for further testing across Southeast Asia’s peri-urban zones—where informal heritage forms and community-based governance practices coexist in complex, transitional institutional conditions.

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