

Beyond Traditional Documentation: Dagoretti Area

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Culture is commonly known as the way of living practiced by people existing in a similar space, making culture dynamic as it changes with people as a result of the external factors within the space. Due to this cultural dynamism, documenting the tacit cultural knowledge becomes hard if not impossible and if done in a manner that doesn't capture its constantly changing parts as it fossilizes the cultural tacit knowledge. This study aims to display the importance of cultural resilience against fossilization of knowledge which is brought about by the popular concept of "documenting for future generations" in comparison to looking at the alternative forms of knowledge that align with the oral communication used to communicate cultural knowledge while going beyond the traditional documentation forms. Lastly, it examines the contribution that various forms of knowledge have had on continuing the legacy of a community and remembering its previous generations. The study was carried out in Dagoretti, Nairobi, Kenya, where a week long ethnographic engagement was carried out by going around the area. This study concludes that fossilization is brought about by a documenting culture that uses forms of knowledge which make it lifeless and skewed. This is the case when using conventional methods to document cultural knowledge which include the authors' interpretation among other perspectives thus taking away from the intended message. The various forms of knowledge discussed were the outcome, from the study carried out in Dagoretti, they are highlighted to display how words alone cannot communicate the depths of a communities' cultural dynamism as a means of preserving tacit knowledge.

Introduction

Culture is the way of life a community lives by; the norms and regulations. This is the case for all communities due to the belief that there is a certain way of living and practices that should be followed for life to be complete. However, we must acknowledge that culture is dynamic and changes due to various factors, both internal and external. Advancement of technology is not the only reason culture changes; it has always been dynamic and changes to fit current living conditions.

Fossilization is the process of fossils being preserved, be it an animal or a plant, in a hard, petrified form. In the context of culture, it is cementing cultural and traditional beliefs, practices and societal structures about a community within a specific area. Especially once it is documented using forms of knowledge and perceptions that do not acknowledge the various forms of cultural knowledge present in different contexts. This knowledge once documented becomes hard if not impossible to change, since the perception has already been created. Additionally, there is confidential information within communities which they are reluctant to share. It is only held by specific people within that community. This is a challenge to communities when researchers seek indigenous knowledge through interviews and the information obtained is said to be final, describing the whole community. This does not acknowledge that, that knowledge keeps changing or is used differently in various occasions.

Writing is one form of externalizing knowledge; from the oral state to the written one that employs words or symbols. Therefore, writing cements indigenous knowledge about a specific area's culture, raising the question **is writing as a form of documentation necessary** for African communities where oral communication is used and the cultural knowledge changes depending on the situation? Norms and practices in African communities are communicated orally on a need basis. Information obtained from communities is not final. This paper questions the appropriate form of knowledge to be adopted in order not to skew indigenous knowledge towards the researcher's interpretation.

The transmission of knowledge is pivotal in safeguarding and sharing cultural heritage, particularly in African communities where tacit knowledge holds significance. In Dagoretti, a lively peri-urban area of Nairobi, Kenya, knowledge is disseminated not solely through formal avenues but also via life narratives, surroundings, environment, structures, documents and other artefacts. This paper delves into the intricacies of tacit knowledge transmission, focusing on the portrayal and preservation of community experiences across various mediums. Dagoretti serves as a unit of Nairobi life, encompassing diverse cultures, histories, and socio-economic dynamics. Through the exploration of key landmarks in the Dagoretti area such as the Riruta Church, Kawangware market, Muslim village households, and the KEZA building project, this study delves into the multifaceted nature of knowledge dissemination within the Architecture as a Form of Knowledge Program. These landmarks not only

function as physical spaces but also as repositories of tacit knowledge, encapsulating the community's collective experiences and narratives.

Central to this exploration is the concept of tacit knowledge, denoting the implicit understanding, skills, and insights ingrained within individuals and communities. Unlike explicit knowledge, which can be formalized and documented, tacit knowledge is often communicated through non-verbal cues, lived experiences, and social interactions. In Dagoretti, tacit knowledge forms the foundation of community identity and resilience, shaping daily practices, beliefs, and values. The methodology employed in this study involved collaboration with selected tour guides from Dagoretti and the Go Down Art Centre, Kilimani, who generously shared their tacit knowledge and personal experiences. Through guided tours of the area, researchers from, Technical University of Kenya, Barnard College; Columbia University and School of Environment and Architecture from Mumbai, gained invaluable insights into life in Dagoretti, from the bustling markets to the serene homesteads. These tour guides served as custodians of tacit knowledge, offering perspectives that transcended traditional documentation methods.

Through this program, groups were able to develop design postcards, reflecting how knowledge dissemination had impacted them, particularly in the realm of architecture. Architecture is designing, planning and construction of buildings. In this study architecture is used to mean the structure or design of something more. A key finding was the inherent value of tacit knowledge in capturing the essence of community life and preserving cultural heritage. While there is increasing emphasis on converting tacit knowledge into explicit forms, such as written records or digital archives, it is crucial to recognize the intrinsic worth of tacit knowledge in its oral and experiential forms. The act of sharing life stories, observing the built environment, and interacting with artefacts fosters a deeper understanding of community dynamics and facilitates knowledge transmission. This was manifested in the outcomes of various groups, as they did not focus on converting knowledge into explicit forms but instead used various forms of knowledge to convey their understanding of the various areas. These depictions spoke volumes about how the groups perceived the different locales without necessarily fossilizing the knowledge.



G's land, initially assigned to different families, reflects a historical trend of unequal distribution. Historically, larger portions have seen substantial development for new settlers, while smaller allocations consistently accommodate ancestral families like Mr. N's. The transition from agricultural land is apparent in the patchwork landscape marked by shrinking land sizes yet escalating in value.

In the neighborhood, a master-planned gated community is emerging, embodying visions of a transformed future for the area. Mr. N's family land, subdivided over generations, reflects a trend of smaller parcels and denser development. His father subdivided the land into 12 plots, allocating two each for his sons and two for himself and his wife. While Mr. N focuses on rental housing as his 'retirement plan', his brother's parcel is witnessing a new commercial development. Following tradition, his parcel will possibly be divided amongst his children. What is the future of this family?

Findings

From the Architecture as a Form of Knowledge program the outputs included various methods of knowledge conversion such as images, 3-D designs, drawings, collages and songs. Group 1 visited Mr. J's Homestead and they were able to produce a 3D design of the homestead. The 3D design was used to disseminate the knowledge they received from the family and display the environment without any loss in converting it to explicit written knowledge. It was an exact replication of the homestead's

layout at the moment of the visit which highlighted the important areas for the family. Additionally, the group designed a stone image which portrayed the sweet potatoes their grandfather would often share with them. Group 2 visited Mr. N's Homestead and designed a drawing from one of the children's perception of a home which included the family, food and drinks. This showed the value of a home and its definition has been passed down to the children. The group was amazed as the child was able to make the definition simple and clear, using stick figures that passed on the message, 'family is important'.



What is a home? Is it the four walls you live in? Is it the place that holds so much heritage? Is a home made on freehold titles and subdivision documents? Or is it a sense of comfort and a place where you feel safe amongst the people you love? The seven-year-old T. would agree with the latter. He describes his home as a place where his family gets together and feasts on soda, meat and chapati. He describes it as a place where he and his cousins can run around and play whilst his grandmother chats with his aunts and uncles. A lot gets revealed through the innocence of a child's drawing. Even though they all live under different roofs within the homestead, he draws all of them under one roof. He draws his grandmother at the centre of the house and his mother and his aunt at the top. He draws himself amongst his cousins beneath his grandmother. To him, the dynamics of a complex and layered system of land, tradition and economy are simple and clear. The homestead in Dagoretti serves as a point of intersection

between ancestral connections, land ownership and worsening financial condition, yet it provides warmth and comfort to all who enter it. It reveals the intangible beauty of the homestead and its quirks. It reveals strong ancestral bonds reflected in three distinct generations and makes one realize what makes a homestead a home.

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Images and collages were also used to display the knowledge within the Dagoretti area and as a way to preserve the area without any loss of information. Group 2 designed an image that included a ceramic plaque found in the home quoting Ephesians 5:28 which talked about husbands loving their wives as they love themselves, which was displayed as a sign of the value system of the family they visited. Group 3 visited St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish–Riruta; they were able to get narratives of the story behind the church and how it is a pivotal point for the people of Dagoretti as it transcends the various phases of their lives and has been present through various generations. An image of the walls of the church was depicted and it showed how close the architecture is to their heart. Mr. M, their tour guide told them he participated in the cementing of the walls, therefore the walls are a living memory that he carries every day. The image on its own without words displayed the importance of the church to the people and the architecture told a story without any words.



An inherited memory “This is my home, this is my inheritance”

I hold on to things, he says, the time my father was building this, he used to say he was building it for me and my family because I was the last son. “As a Kikuyu, the last son has to inherit the house the father lives in.” His father was employed by a European as a Shamba boy. “My father was very happy that Europeans promoted him from being a gardener to a cook. He was taught about cooking and everything related to it. After that he was taken to Italy where he was employed by the government press. It is from the earnings he made there that my father bought this land. This house was built in 1975. We were the first family in the area to build a permanent house. He still has his father’s things, such as the record player which he had held close to his ears and listened to. He also had a typewriter that his father had used when he was working for the European.

His memories are the storytellers of history. His house, a land of remembrance, an inherited memory. Such collective memories are always shifting—after all it’s about how he has arranged his house and the spaces within it, his living room which is also the dining area. The kitchen with a backyard garden. Gardening is an activity which he inherited from his father. He waxed poetic when describing his garden, the avocado tree grown as tall as the fence. A little pepper plant nestled at the corner and the snake plant growing near a drum. The tall croton tree with its branches hanging out. The garden ... weaved a narrative of memories that he had inherited from his father, it seemed to be a canvas curated by him, a garden of memories.

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Lastly, Group 5 visited Kawangware market, and created a collage of the names of the shops in the market as a means of showing how names carry meaning. The collage cut across religious connotations, identity with places, activities, brands and aspirations. The collage was a means to display the built environment in Kawangware market and how the names of the shops stem from one's identity and what resonates deeply with them. The title of the collage was "*jina za duka*" which goes against Kiswahili tenses which would have been "*majina ya maduka*". However, that is the local saying, which was important in portraying the reality of the market and which the local people of Dagoretti could easily associate with the collage. Without using any words, the group was able to use a diverse knowledge form.

Lastly, Group 6 visited the Mararo Homestead; they were able to use a song to communicate the dreams of continuity and rupture that the family held dear in the story of their life. The family values the home and they used a Kikuyu song "*Ngemi Ciumaga Nakū*" by Joseph Kamaru to communicate the values of the family's life's narrative. Architecture is used to showcase this in a way that still maintains the life narratives, surroundings, structures, documents, and artefacts. This is an aspect of how knowledge conversion is not just about using words to document it. Other forms of knowledge such as architecture can be used to conserve knowledge for future use in a manner that preserves its meaning.

This study highlights the importance of embracing alternative approaches to knowledge dissemination that respect the tacit nature of indigenous knowledge systems. By embracing visual storytelling, participatory design, and artistic expression, researchers can establish inclusive platforms for knowledge exchange that resonate with local communities. Through collaborative efforts, tacit knowledge can be celebrated and preserved in ways that enrich both academic scholarship and community empowerment.

In summary, this study emphasizes the significance of tacit knowledge transmission in Dagoretti as a means of portraying the lived experiences and cultural heritage of its people. By embracing the richness of oral traditions, environmental cues, and material culture, researchers can engage in a more inclusive exploration of community dynamics and foster mutual learning and appreciation of tacit knowledge. Ultimately, the practice of disseminating tacit knowledge stands as a testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of communities in safeguarding their

collective wisdom for future generations, without external interpretations skewing it.

Was the research being done capturing the African essence, in the knowledge captured and documented? Or is it another way of people telling their stories in the pretense of doing research and skewing the knowledge of communities to fit a desired perception. Is it better to leave the knowledge oral and get it from the primary source risking the loss of knowledge once the primary source dies? Or try and customize the forms of knowledge to fit into the oral nature of tacit knowledge, specifically from African communities which use it as a primary mode of communication.

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