

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES MAPPING AND ASNAF LIVELIHOOD: A SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF PERLIS

HUSSAIN, M. R. M.^{1*} – TUKIMAN, I.¹ – YUSUF, B. N. M.² – RAHIM, R. T. A.³

¹ *Department of Landscape Architecture, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.*

² *Faculty of Business and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UNIMAP), Perlis Malaysia.*

³ *Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Syed Sirajuddin (UNISIRAJ), Perlis, Malaysia.*

**Corresponding author
e-mail: ramzi[at]iium.edu.my*

(Received 14th December 2025; revised 11th March 2026; accepted 25th March 2026)

Abstract. Cultural mapping is employed as a systematic tool to identify, record, and analyze community resources, providing a structured approach to understanding the cultural and historical assets of a region. In the context of Perlis, cultural mapping serves to document the existence of historical sites, cultural identities, and socio-cultural activities, which collectively form the foundation for promoting the states tourism sector. This study involved a total of 13 respondents, whose insights helped to capture the perspectives of the local community, particularly the Asnaf groups, regarding the significance of cultural heritage and its potential economic benefits. The outcomes of the cultural mapping process are recorded as valuable resources that can be leveraged by government bodies and relevant agencies to enhance tourism development and planning. Beyond their contribution to the tourism industry, these documented resources provide opportunities for local communities to engage in income-generating activities, thereby improving financial stability and resilience. By systematically identifying both existing and emerging cultural assets, this study demonstrates how cultural landscape mapping can function as a dual-purpose tool: supporting sustainable tourism while empowering marginalized groups such as the Asnaf community to participate actively in the local economy.

Keywords: *cultural mapping, community resources, Asnaf, socio-cultural, financial stability*

Introduction

Cultural landscapes are recognised as the combined works of nature and humankind that express a long, intimate relationship between people and their natural environment, illustrating how human societies have interacted with, shaped, and been shaped by the land over time (UNESCO, 2010; 2007). These landscapes result from cultural evolution in which culture, as a unique human quality, continually interacts with natural settings making both landscape and culture inherently dynamic and subject to change (NPS, 2022). Cultural landscapes encompass the everyday environments that surround us, showing physical traces of human intervention alongside natural features. They embody a record of human activity and values, reflecting historical land use, cultural identity, and evolving social practices. Contemporary research also highlights their significance for sustainable management, heritage conservation, and the fostering of cultural and natural capital, which can benefit communities and support broader developmental objectives (Petrosillo et al., 2025).

The term cultural landscape, however, is complex conceptually. Nevertheless, it has yet to generally accept a definition, making it difficult to ascertain what constitutes the

landscape to be protected and how to create an appropriate boundary (Hua and Zhou, 2015). According to Plachter and Rössler (1995), the cultural landscape is a complex phenomenon with tangible and intangible identities. The tangible component arises from ideas and interactions that impact a landscape's perceptions and shaping, such as sacred beliefs closely linked to the landscape and the way it has been perceived over time. Nature conservation, species protection and nature reserves constitute the primary approach. Moreover, over recent years, rapidly changing economic and social systems have led to a new interest in managing landscapes because of increased environmental concerns. The significance of cultural landscape is in some documents related to beliefs and traditions attached to localities. Such conceptions express symbolic or identity values. It illustrates how the cultural landscape is not only a concrete physical reality but is also connected to meanings. This concept has been used in geographical literature since the end of the 19th century (Jones and Daugstad, 1997).

Review of literature

Eagleton (2013) and Haber (1995) note that the Latin root of the word culture is *colere*, which can mean anything from cultivating and inhabiting to worshipping and protecting. Culture may be said to be about a group of people with a set of values and beliefs which embody ideals, and it is transmitted to members of the group through enculturation. Culture, then, inherits the imposing mantle of religious authority but also has an uneasy affinity with occupation or invasion; and it is between two poles, positive and negative, that the concept is currently pitched. It is one of those rare ideas which have been as integral to the political left as they are vital to the political right. Its social history is thus exceptionally tangled and ambivalent. According to Rapoport, culture as a concept is too broad to relate to environmental design alone, and it is helpful to consider how it might be subdivided. It is typical of a group as a way of life; culture as a system of symbols, meanings and schemata transmitted through symbolic codes; culture as a set of adaptive strategies for survival-related resources and ecology. The idea of culture signifies a double refusal: of organic determinism on the one hand and of the autonomy of spirit on the other. The term culture is sometimes considered the opposite of nature and is commonly rewarded with the accolade of being the most complex. However, though it is fashionable these days to see nature as a derivative of culture, culture, etymologically speaking, is a concept from nature (McHarg, 2006). While, the everyday meaning of landscape, stated in the Collins English Dictionary, is an extensive area of scenery as viewed from a single place. Muir (1999) redefines landscape as a way of seeing. According to Muir (1999), the landscape is:

“Landscape has many facets and there are many ways in which it can be represented; it is a physical and multi-sensory medium (earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound and silence, light and darkness) in which cultural meanings and values are encoded, whether they are put there by the physical transformation of place in landscape gardening and architecture presented by painting, drawing or engraving; by photography, film and theatrical scenery; by writing, speech and presumably even music and other sound image.”

The landscape is an expression of a places region (in terms of climate, vegetation, geological structure, etc.). Natural scenery profoundly influences the perception of places, being experienced through all senses. Different climatic regions determine

vegetation, animal communities and landforms that affect vernacular building forms and landscapes in urban areas (Hough, 1990). The term landscape combines land with a word of ancient Germanic origin, the verb *scape/scapjan* which means to work, to be busy, to do something creative mainly with a plan or design in mind. During the evolution of the Germanic languages, *scapjan* became *schaffen* in German. *Schaffen* or shaping in or on the land can be done both by natural agents or forces resulting in a natural landscape and by humans who create not always intentionally a cultural landscape (Haber, 1995). Cultural landscape, therefore, comprises the reflections and interactions between people and their natural environment over space and time. In this context, nature is the counterpart to human society; both are dynamic forces shaping landscapes (Plachter and Rössler, 1995). As properties, cultural landscapes have become recognized as a separate category of sites, requiring different and innovative conservation and management concepts. This recognition of the value of cultural landscapes encourages countries to find more funds for management and protection. It leads to tremendous respect for a landscape, its component, and its inhabitants.

Fikri et al. (2020) outline ten characters that represent their understanding of the cultural landscape in Perlis. They are Land Uses and Activities, Patterns and Spatial Organization, Response to Natural Environment, Cultural Traditions, Circulation Networks, Vegetation Related to Land Use, Buildings and Structures, Small Scale Elements, Boundaries Demarcation and lastly, View and Vista to collect the visual of human level and related data. (1) Land use and Activities Land: The primary human forces that shape and organize rural communities. Human activities, such as farming, mining, ranching, recreational, social events, commerce, or industry, have left an imprint on the landscape. Topography variations, availability of transportation, the abundance or scarcity of natural resources (especially water), cultural traditions, and economic factors influence how people use the land. (2) Patterns and Spatial Organization: It is the organization of land on a large scale related to activities' relationship of physical components, natural features, predominant landforms, and historic spatial areas. At the same time, technology and economical as well as natural resources are influenced by the organization of the local communities as it defines settlement patterns. (3) Response to The Natural Environments: This feature has resulted from adapting to climates and natural features that have been in some element. The natural element feature will be the primary influencer in determining the character of the environment itself. (4) Cultural Traditions: Cover the whole act or movement that symbolizes a culture, such as land-use practices, construction patterns, community organization skills, and traditional plant utilization inherited and maintained in everyday life. Cultural Tradition can be classified into two categories: tangible and intangible. The tangible element can be touched or viewed directly and assessed directly through observation, such as traditional economics, community organization, trade and skill, craftsmanship and use of plants. An intangible element cannot be touched or evaluated by observation because it cannot be seen with the naked eye because it is a practice deed or belief such as ethnic or religious activity.

(5) Circulation Networks Circulation: A system for transporting people, goods, and raw materials from one point to another. They range in scale from livestock trails and footpaths to roads, canals, major highways and even airstrips. (6) Vegetation and Wildlife: Related to land use, compress functional and ornamental trees and shrubs, fields for cropping, tree lines along walls and roads, native vegetation, orchards, groves, woodlots, pastures, gardens alleys, shelter, belts, forest and grasslands. The inventory

conducted in the area showed that vegetation contributes to visual attractiveness simultaneously. It also provides benefits to the residents. (7) Buildings, Structures: Various types of buildings, structures and objects serve human needs related to the occupation and use of the land. Their function, materials, date, condition, construction method and location reflect the historical activities, customs, tastes and skills of the people who built and used them. (8) Small-Scale Elements: It can be defined as elements that become a characteristic of the landscape and repeatedly occur throughout the area, thus contributing to the historical setting of the rural landscape. It can be functional, decorative, or both. The small-scale elements can be either long-lasting (permanent) or temporary (seasonal). Collectively, they can form more significant components, such as circulation networks or boundary demarcations. Generally, small-scale elements can add to the landscape's setting by type, function, general location, and approximate location. (9) Boundaries Demarcation: It is related to the site boundaries based on each site's historical timeline and heritage elements. The criteria become the image and identity of the place that becomes an element of the cultural landscape, unique and iconic places. (10) View and Vista: It can be based on the scenic view, or anything related to the beautiful image and scenery of the places. For example, the view of hilly areas, seaside, wide ocean and the panoramic character of the forest, and sunset scenic view of a place. Thus, the documentation of Perlis cultural landscape highlights its importance as a living heritage that reflects the diversity and cultural richness of local communities. When recognised as a strategic asset, this heritage has the potential to strengthen the states cultural economy and enhance community resilience and development.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research approach based on primary data collection. The state of Perlis is employed as a case study to elicit in-depth insights into its existing cultural landscape. Data are collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, which serve as a key method for obtaining rich qualitative information. The semi-structured interviews capture public perspectives, experiences, and suggestions, enabling the identification of cultural assets and existing landscape characteristics valued by the community. The research process is conducted in three main stages. First, qualitative data gathered from the interviews are compiled and organised to identify recurring themes related to people, places, and environmental attributes. Second, the collected information is processed through mapping and documentation to produce spatial representations (maps/plans) of selected areas and sites. Third, an analytical stage is undertaken to synthesise the findings and determine significant cultural landscape assets. The final output of this process is a mapped cultural landscape of Perlis, which visually represents key cultural assets and provides a structured basis for interpretation, planning, and future tourism-related applications.

Results and Discussion

There are many tangible and intangible cultural landscape elements in the state of Perlis. It is instrumental in developing the local tourism sector and becoming an attraction for tourists outside of Perlis and abroad. These existing tourist spots provide returns to the state government's economy and opportunities for communities to help

improve their local economy. The programs and activities need to be continued and improved to become an indicator of the economic stability of the people. It can also open new opportunities for the involvement of more communities in making Perlis a state with better economic stability. It also shows that the tourism sector based on culture can improve the economy of the local population. This section presents the findings derived from semi-structured interviews conducted across three parliamentary constituencies in Perlis: Padang Besar, Arau, and Kangar.

Interesting places of the cultural landscape of Perlis

The section presents the interesting places of the cultural landscape of Perlis (Table 1, Figure 1 and Figure 2). When asked about the tourist places related to culture in the state of Perlis, the Asnaf gave various answers that referred to the local situation and their surroundings. This shows that they understand and know the local culture that is still practiced. The next question relates to places or local cultural elements that can be highlighted as a new attraction that can contribute to the development of the local economy. In total, 13 respondents were involved in the interviews. They were the Asnaf from the three parliaments, Padang Besar, Kangar and Arau. The answers given show that there are more new places that need to be highlighted as interesting places that need to be visited. In the meantime, there are also cultural elements that need to be revived so that it becomes a unique attraction for the future. All of these will also contribute to the economic development of Asnaf in the proposed areas.

Table 1. *The existing and featured cultural landscape tourism spots of Perlis.*

Respondent (Parliament)	Existing Local Tourism Spots (Tempat Pelancongan Setempat Sedia Ada)	Featured Local Tourism Spots (Tempat Pelancongan Setempat Berpotensi Dikembangkan)
Parliament of Kangar		
Asnaf 1	Jerami Gulung, Kangar	There is a river in the nearby area that can be developed into a place for fishing competitions.
Asnaf 2	Muzium Kota Kayang	There is a river in the nearby area that can be developed into a place for fishing competitions (the Asnaf can sell food/drinks when the program is organized).
Asnaf 3	Jalan Seni Kangar	The surrounding area has beautiful views of rice fields and rivers. Potential for activities such as fishing, decorative canoes, and lake games.
Asnaf 4	Taman Bunga Kertas Lailatul Shahreen, Gua Cenderawasih	Pounding of <i>pimping/pemping</i> , puppet shows and fish catching activities in the dry/drought summer after the rice harvest season.
Parliament of Padang Besar		
Asnaf 5	Tasik Timah Tasoh, Gua Kelam	Nearby dams are suitable for freshwater activities such as fishing and catching fish.
Asnaf 6	Taman Buah-buahan, Taman Ular, Bukit Ayer	The surrounding area is commercialized as a tour of the <i>ladang harum manis</i> (mango) plantation because the area has a sweet pepper collection center for sale to end users. Suggesting that, since this area has 4 water dams, one of these dams has the potential to be used as a tourist attraction area for activities such as canoeing, food businesses, kayaking, fishing competitions and other suitable water activities.
Asnaf 7	Tasik Melati, Kompleks Padang Besar	Freshwater fishing activities are revived during the rice harvest season. The <i>harum manis</i> (mango) fruit has the potential to be processed into sweet and fragrant juice, ice cream and candies and sold in the surrounding area as commercialized.
Asnaf 8	Santuari Ikan Air Tawar	Tourist activities at Bukit Matakuch such as rock climbing and exploring the hill's caves.

Parliament of Arau			Proposes that the water dam area has the potential to be used as a fishing and angling area.
Asnaf 9	Rumah Warisan Arau, Galeri DiRaja Istana Arau		There is no suitable area because it is a residential area.
Asnaf 10	Rumah Warisan Arau		It has a river suitable for fishing activities.
Asnaf 11	Rumah Warisan Arau		Proposes that Asnaf has a single collection point to facilitate the sale of products to consumers who are interested in buying directly from entrepreneurs at reasonable prices.
Asnaf 12	Ladang Nipah Kipli		Suggests that Asnaf have a single collection point to facilitate the sale of products to end users because they do not have suitable transportation for product distribution (which is ordered by customers via WhatsApp).
Asnaf 13	Rumah Warisan Arau		There are skills in growing bonsai trees that have the potential to be commercialized.

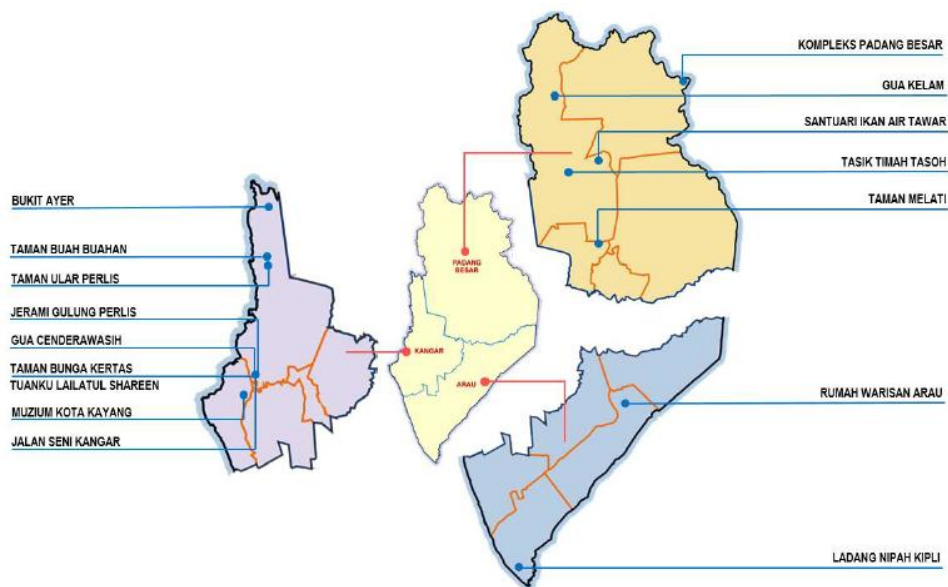


Figure 1. Existing local tourism spots in Perlis.

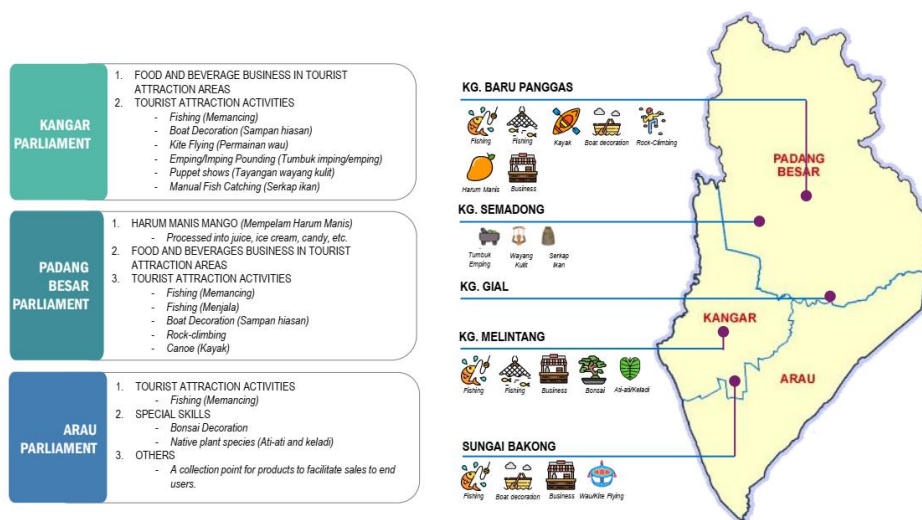


Figure 2. Featured local tourism spot.

Potential Asnaf products (culturally based products)

According to 13 Asnaf respondents who were interviewed, more suggestions need to be highlighted as an initial step to strengthen further the cultural landscape's value in contributing to the economy of Asnaf itself. For example, the Kangar Parliamentary constituency, Asnaf 1, suggested that every Asnaf be allowed to plant 'harum manis' plants around their homes so that they can enjoy the product and sell it to the surrounding area (Figure 3). It can cover the needs of the family. In addition, they hope to be given seedlings for free for this method.

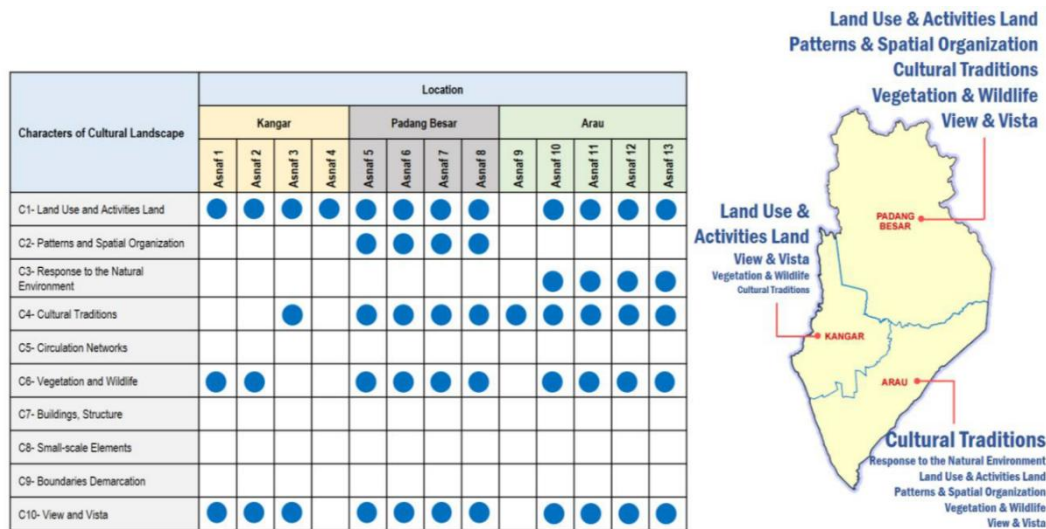


Figure 3. Potential Asnaf products (culturally based product) based on characters of cultural landscape in three areas of Perlis.

The interviews reveal that culturally based activities have become increasingly significant across the state of Perlis. Respondents from all three parliamentary constituencies consistently highlighted agricultural-based activities embedded within their cultural traditions as a key catalyst for the involvement and participation of Asnaf groups. Beyond creating new income opportunities, such activities were perceived as an effective means of strengthening household economic conditions. Respondents expressed the view that even small-scale participation could contribute meaningfully to family livelihoods, while also generating broader economic benefits at the local and state levels. However, they emphasised that sustained involvement requires institutional support from the state government, particularly in the form of start-up capital, advisory services, skills training, and ongoing guidance. In addition, respondents noted the need for designated and well-organised spaces to serve as collection or distribution centres for Asnaf entrepreneurs, enabling safer, more efficient, and wider distribution of their products.

In addition to agriculture-based activities, members of the Asnaf group suggested engagement in ecotourism-related initiatives as a viable livelihood strategy. Such activities were viewed as offering opportunities for Asnaf participants to venture into small-scale entrepreneurship through the management and operation of ecotourism businesses. Respondents believed that involvement in this sector could open new pathways for the Asnaf community to become local entrepreneurs while fostering greater awareness of, and sensitivity to, local environmental and cultural activities as sources of income generation. The Asnaf groups should be actively involved in craft-

based activities, as this can foster the development of a craft network among interested Asnaf communities in Perlis. The availability of diverse local resources provides a strong foundation for craft production and serves as an accessible resource base for the Asnaf group. Beyond the creation of craft products, such involvement can enhance skills, creativity, and innovation among participants. These activities not only offer additional income-generating opportunities but also contribute to elevating the dignity, confidence, and social standing of the Asnaf community.

Conclusion

This research underscores the significance of cultural landscape mapping as a methodological and analytical tool for strengthening the tourism industry in Perlis, as articulated in *Cultural Landscapes Mapping and Asnaf Livelihoods: A Spatial Analysis of Perlis*. The findings demonstrate that the distinctive characteristics of Perlis cultural landscape form the backbone of its spatial and cultural identity, while also providing a foundation for livelihood-based tourism initiatives. Through the application of cultural landscape mapping techniques, the study confirms that strong cultural connections to local contexts can foster cohesion among Asnaf communities, enabling them to compete constructively and establish close, collaborative networks across the state. The selection of Asnaf participants based on parliamentary constituencies further illustrates that each community represents the broader Asnaf population in Perlis, both in terms of diversity and scale. The ideas and insights shared by the Asnaf groups emerge as substantive proposals that warrant serious consideration by the state government in efforts to further improve their socioeconomic conditions. While expressing gratitude for existing forms of assistance and donations, the Asnaf communities also articulated the need for sustained and structured support, emphasising that the integration of their ideas and suggestions into cultural landscape-based planning and tourism strategies would benefit not only individual households but the collective wellbeing of all Asnaf groups in Perlis.

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Majlis Agama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu Perlis (MAIPs) for their support through the Jamalullail Research Grant Scheme (JRGS), administered via the Research Management Center (RMC) of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), for providing the research grant JRGS21-007-0007.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

REFERENCES

- [1] Eagleton, T. (2013): *The idea of culture*. – John Wiley & Sons 256p.
- [2] Fikri, M.A., Abd Latif, F.A., Mohamed Ali, S. (2020): Restoring and resuscitating the cultural landscape of Kg Pulau Ketam, Perlis. – *Built Environment Journal (BEJ)* 17(1): 17-26.

- [3] Haber, W. (1995): Concept, origin and meaning of landscapes. – In *Cultural Landscapes of Universal Value: Components of A Global Strategy* 38p.
- [4] Hough, M. (1990): *Out of place: Restoring identity to the regional landscape.* – Yale University Press 240p.
- [5] Hua, H., Zhou, S. (2015): Human-environment system boundaries: A case study of the Honghe Hani rice terraces as a world heritage cultural landscape. – *Sustainability* 7(8): 10733-10755.
- [6] Jones, M., Daugstad, K. (1997): Usages of the “cultural landscape” concept in Norwegian and Nordic landscape administration. – *Landscape Research* 22(3): 267-281.
- [7] McHarg, I.L. (2006): *The essential Ian McHarg: writings on design and nature.* – Island Press 190p.
- [8] Muir, R. (1999): *Approaches to landscape.* – Red Globe Press 336p.
- [9] National Park Service (NPS) (2022): *Understand cultural landscapes.* – NPS Web Portal 8p.
- [10] Plachter, H., Rössler, M. (1995): Cultural landscapes: reconnecting culture and nature. – In *Cultural Landscapes of Universal Value: Components of A Global Strategy* 15p.
- [11] Petrosillo, I., Lovello, E.M., Ria, L., Tartara, P., Valente, D. (2025): Sustainable Management of UNESCO Landscapes to Foster Natural and Cultural Capital. – *Sustainability* 17(19): 17p.
- [12] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2010): *Cultural Landscapes.* – UNESCO 21p.
- [13] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2007): *World Heritage Convention glossary: Cultural landscape.* – UNESCO 1p.