

Advocacy for the Spice Route Program: Strategies for Preservation, Cultural Diplomacy, and UNESCO World Heritage Nomination.

Abstract: This paper presents a policy-oriented analysis of Indonesia's initiative to nominate the Spice Route for UNESCO recognition by situating it at the intersection of heritage preservation, cultural diplomacy, and soft power strategy. Moving beyond descriptive historical reconstruction, the study proposes an integrated analytical framework that links archaeological and documentary evidence, institutional governance, and international diplomacy through a dual-track UNESCO approach encompassing both World Heritage and Memory of the World mechanisms. Employing a qualitative-descriptive methodology, the research draws on policy documents, historical sources, and expert consultations to assess strategic directions, institutional challenges, and Indonesia's readiness for the nomination process. The study reframes the Spice Route not merely as a legacy of historical trade, but as a contemporary strategic cultural asset that reasserts Nusantara's central role in early global maritime networks and intercivilizational exchanges. The findings demonstrate that successful nomination requires coherent policy alignment, effective cross-ministerial coordination, and sustained international collaboration, particularly in addressing transnational narratives and shared heritage claims. By outlining practical advocacy pathways for policymakers, cultural institutions, and diplomatic actors, this paper contributes to the advancement of heritage diplomacy and offers a replicable model for other transboundary cultural routes within contemporary international relations.

Keyword: Spice Route Heritage; UNESCO Nomination Strategy; Heritage Diplomacy; Cultural Heritage Advocacy; Dual-track Heritage Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The strategic position of the Nusantara, located between two continents and two oceans, has historically made this region a crucial node in interactions between the Eastern and Western worlds (Tri Achmadi et al., 2022). From a maritime geopolitical perspective, the Spice Route played a fundamental role in shaping the early global economic system long before the emergence of modern capitalism, while also serving as a medium for the exchange of commodities, knowledge, technology, values, and belief systems across civilizations. This route functioned not only as a trade corridor but also as a space of cultural interaction that shaped the mosaic of contemporary Indonesian identity through processes of acculturation involving Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and European influences (Kumoratih, 2017a)(Kumoratih, 2017b). Awareness of this historical and strategic significance prompted the Government of Indonesia to launch the Spice Route Program (Pengelola Web Kemendikbud, 2021) as an effort to revitalize the narrative of Nusantara's maritime civilization and to strengthen national identity in a global context, while positioning it as a strategic cultural asset for international diplomacy and sustainable development (Nurwahyuni et al., 2020).

In this context, policy advocacy becomes a key element in ensuring the sustainability of the Spice Route Program, particularly in efforts to obtain international recognition through UNESCO mechanisms, both World Heritage (Tim Ditjen Kebudayaan, 2023) and Memory of the World (Edmondson, 2020). This research is grounded in the need for a systematic, cross-sectorally coordinated, and evidence-based advocacy framework to address challenges related to governance, shared heritage claims, and the management of transnational narratives. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of heritage diplomacy scholarship by offering an integrated analytical approach that links historical and archaeological evidence, institutional governance, and cultural diplomacy strategies. This approach broadens the understanding of cultural routes not merely as relics of the past, but as strategic instruments in contemporary international relations.

Technically and practically, the findings of this study provide an operational reference for policymakers, cultural institutions, and diplomatic actors in designing UNESCO nomination advocacy strategies that are effective, inclusive, and sustainable. By emphasizing the importance of alignment with national policies, strengthening inter-ministerial coordination, and fostering sustained international collaboration, this study offers an advocacy model that can be replicated for other transnational cultural routes. Accordingly, this research not only contributes to strengthening the academic literature on cultural diplomacy and heritage preservation, but also provides a relevant policy foundation for

52 managing cultural heritage as a strategic resource for Indonesia's culturally sovereign and globally
53 competitive future.

54 The strategic location of Nusantara—situated between two continents and two oceans—has
55 historically rendered the region a crucial nexus between the Eastern and Western world's (Tri Achmadi et
56 al., 2022). From the perspective of maritime geopolitics, the Spice Route significantly contributed to the
57 formation of the early global economic system, preceding the advent of modern capitalism. Within the
58 broader framework of world history, Nusantara contributions to global dynamics—manifested through
59 commodities, cultural exchange, and the dissemination of knowledge—are inextricably linked to the
60 historical existence and function of the Spice Route.

61 The Spice Route in Nusantara functioned not merely as a trade corridor, but also as a conduit
62 between Eastern and Western civilizations, leaving behind an extraordinary historical legacy that endures
63 to this day. Along this route, there occurred not only the exchange of goods, but also the flow of ideas,
64 values, and belief systems. The teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam (Kumoratih, 2017a), as well
65 as European influences, took root in the archipelago through this channel. Likewise, knowledge,
66 navigational technology, architectural arts, and literature flourished as a result of sustained contact with
67 foreign cultures (Kumoratih, 2017b). This process gave rise to local cultures that are both adaptive and
68 rich in intercultural elements, illustrating how the Spice Route played a formative role in shaping the
69 cultural mosaic of contemporary Indonesian identity.

70 Through the historical reconstruction of the Spice Route, we are reminded that Indonesia
71 possesses a civilizational heritage of not only national significance but also global relevance. The Spice
72 Route is not merely a narrative of the past; it stands as tangible evidence of the active engagement of
73 the Indonesian ancestors in the broader currents of world history. Recognizing the importance of the
74 Spice Route as a fundamental part of the nation's historical and cultural identity, the Government of
75 Indonesia—through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology—launched the Spice
76 Route Program (Pengelola Web Kemendikbud, 2021). This initiative represents a strategic effort to
77 revitalize the grand narrative of the Spice Route as a world cultural heritage rooted in Nusantara, while
78 also fostering a collective national consciousness of Indonesia's pivotal role in global civilization. Adopting
79 a multidisciplinary approach and engaging a wide range of stakeholders, the Program reintroduces the
80 story of the Spice Route to the public through cultural voyages, research expeditions, spice festivals, and
81 the strengthening of public content. In doing so, it establishes an inclusive and sustainable cultural
82 preservation movement.

83 The preservation of the Spice Route forms part of a sustainable national development strategy
84 that positions culture as a strategic resource to support the creative economy, cultural tourism, and
85 international diplomacy (Nurwahyuni et al., 2020). This program revitalizes the historical narrative of the
86 Spice Route as a symbol of courage and diversity, while also serving as an effort to redress the
87 dominance of colonial narratives in shaping historical perceptions of Nusantara. Through an inclusive
88 approach and international outreach, the Spice Route Program has become a cultural diplomacy
89 instrument that reinforces Indonesia's identity as a maritime nation and contributes to building a
90 culturally sovereign and globally empowered future.

91 Revitalizing the Spice Route, therefore, requires robust advocacy, cross-sectoral collaboration, and
92 effective communication strategies to ensure the preservation of its cultural heritage as both a national
93 cultural symbol and a globally resonant strategic narrative. In this context, advocacy functions as a vital
94 instrument for securing international recognition of the program—particularly in the nomination of the
95 Spice Route as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site (World Heritage) (Tim Ditjen Kebudayaan, 2023)
96 and for inclusion in the Memory of the World (Edmondson, 2020) register. Through such efforts, the Spice
97 Route is not merely remembered as a relic of the past but is reimagined as a living cultural force that
98 illuminates Indonesia's pathway towards a culturally sovereign future. Advocacy in this regard is expected
99 to strengthen Indonesia's position on the global stage by highlighting the nation's rich maritime history
100 and cultural heritage.

101 This article examines a strategically designed and systematically implemented advocacy
102 framework to support the sustainability of the Spice Route Program as a preservation effort for national
103 cultural heritage of historical and strategic significance within a global context. Advocacy strategies serve

104 as a crucial instrument in raising public awareness, strengthening policy legitimacy, and fostering cross-
105 sectoral engagement involving government agencies, academics, cultural communities, creative economy
106 actors, and international networks.

107 Beyond functioning as a mere communication tool, advocacy constitutes the foundation for
108 long-term cultural policy aimed at supporting the nomination of the Spice Route to UNESCO's World
109 Heritage List (Tim Ditjen Kebudayaan, 2023) or the Memory of the World Register. It also reinforces
110 Indonesia's role in the sphere of international cultural diplomacy.

111 The success of such nominations would not only strengthen national identity and stimulate
112 cultural tourism and research but also create new opportunities for culture-based economic
113 development. In turn, this would contribute to sustainable national development while affirming
114 Indonesia's standing as a nation that values its history, culture, and diversity on the global stage.

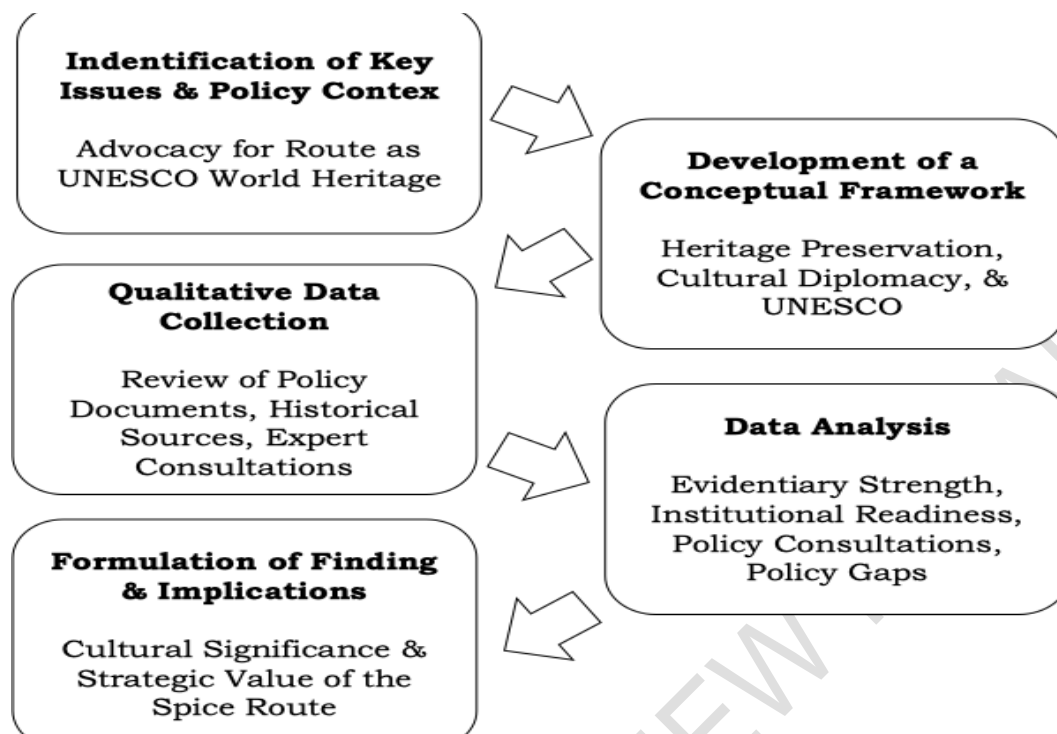
115 The criteria for selecting research objects for the Spice Route are based on interconnected
116 academic, historical, and policy considerations. Objects are selected for their direct and well-documented
117 links to the networks of spice production, distribution, and exchange within the maritime context of
118 Nusantara, as evidenced by archaeological data, written sources, historical maps, and living oral
119 traditions. In addition, the selected objects represent the continuity of spatial functions from the past to
120 the present, whether as cultural landscapes, ports, production centers, or nodes of interregional and
121 inter-civilizational interaction. Further criteria include the level of integrity and authenticity of the cultural
122 remains, their potential Outstanding Universal Value, and their relevance to the Spice Route narrative as
123 a shared, transnational heritage. The selection process also takes into account institutional readiness,
124 stakeholder support, and data availability as prerequisites for sustainable management and the
125 strengthening of policy-based arguments, particularly in the context of international heritage advocacy.

126 *Methods*

127 This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach to examine Indonesia's initiative to secure
128 UNESCO recognition for the Spice Route. Data collection involves analysis of policy documents, historical
129 sources, and consultations with experts related to the nomination and preservation of the Spice Route.
130 This approach aims to identify strategic directions and institutional frameworks critical for supporting the
131 comprehensive nomination process. The research utilizes various historical and policy documents,
132 including local and international archives, ancient manuscripts, and academic studies. A systematic
133 analysis is conducted to interpret and reconstruct the historical narrative of the Spice Route, highlighting
134 its significant role in trade and cultural exchange between Nusantara and the wider world. Collaboration
135 with historians, anthropologists, and cultural experts ensures the validity and robust support of the
136 cultural narrative for nomination purposes. The study integrates a cross-sectoral approach, incorporating
137 input from government agencies, local cultural communities, academia, and creative economy actors.
138 This synergy expands the research focus beyond historical and cultural aspects to include advocacy
139 strategies, cultural diplomacy, and policy development aimed at sustainable preservation of the Spice
140 Route. Such an approach strengthens both the academic and societal relevance of the preservation
141 initiative.

142 The research begins with the identification of key issues and the policy context concerning the
143 advocacy of the Spice Route as a UNESCO World Heritage nomination within the framework of cultural
144 diplomacy. It then develops a conceptual framework integrating heritage preservation, cultural
145 diplomacy, and UNESCO mechanisms. Qualitative data are collected through the review of policy
146 documents, historical sources, and expert consultations, and analyzed to assess evidentiary strength,
147 institutional readiness, and policy gaps. The final stage formulates the findings, implications, and policy
148 recommendations, as well as an advocacy model applicable to the Spice Route and other transnational
149 cultural routes. Ethical standards are strictly observed, with no involvement of human participants or
150 sensitive personal data, thereby obviating the need for ethical approval. All sources are properly
151 acknowledged in accordance with citation and intellectual property norms. The research maintains
152 integrity by avoiding data fabrication or plagiarism and aligns with UNESCO's principles fostering
153 responsible heritage advocacy and international cooperation.

154



157
158 **FIGURE. 1** Research Process for the Spice Route UNESCO Nomination

RESULTS

The historical and cultural values of the spice route

The spice trade was one of the earliest global trade networks, linking Asia (Averbuch, 2022), East Africa (Simson R, 2003), and Europe(Sutherland, 2024) since the third millennium BCE, with high-value spices such as cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, ginger, and turmeric widely exchanged across the Eastern world. Initially conducted overland, the trade expanded through maritime routes pioneered by Austronesian seafarers from Southeast Asia, including Nusantara, who by 1500 BCE had established connections to Sri Lanka, India, East Africa(Averbuch, 2022), and even Madagascar, (Ann Kumar, 2011). Owing to its abundant production of cloves, nutmeg, pepper, and cinnamon (Ladiqi et al., 2019), Nusantara became a central hub within the Spice Route—a maritime network that shaped global trade from the 5th to the 17th century (Andaya, 1993). From the early first millennium CE, traders from China, India, and later the Arab world engaged with local kingdoms such as Tarumanegara(Lombard-Salmon, 2002) and Sriwijaya, (Wessing, 2011), while maritime powers including Sriwijaya, Majapahit, Ternate, and Tidore managed sea routes and production centres. Key ports such as Barus, Aceh, Banten, and Gresik functioned as vital nodes within this corridor (Sulaiman et al., 2018), underscoring Nusantara’s active role in shaping early global trade dynamics.

The arrival of European powers—Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and British—in Nusantara reflects the strategic importance of its spices within global political and economic competition (Sutherland, 2024), particularly during the 15th–17th centuries when Europeans sought direct control over spice production and distribution (Ladiqi et al., 2019). The Maluku Islands, known as the “Spice Islands,” became the primary source of highly valued cloves and nutmeg (Andaya, 1993), transforming Nusantara into a focal point for traders, explorers, and colonial powers (Sulaiman et al., 2018). While high-value spices positioned Nusantara as a long-standing hub of global(Averbuch, 2022)trade connecting Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe(Nugraha, 2022), colonial domination also brought exploitation through forced cultivation, VOC monopolies, and curvelabor) (Fasseur, 1986),triggering major resistance movements such as the Java War [21]and the Aceh War (Rahmawati & Suswandari, 2022). At the same time, colonial rule introduced infrastructure, administrative systems, and Western education(Tichelman,

186 1980), which contributed to the rise of a native intelligentsia and nationalist movement (Suratminto,
 187 2013). These processes left enduring legacies of social inequality (Wertheim, 1955), export
 188 dependency (Fahmi, 2020), and bureaucratic structures (Nordholt, 2011) that continue to shape modern
 189 Indonesia.

190 The Spice Route in Nusantara functioned not only as a trade corridor but also as a major conduit
 191 of cultural exchange between Eastern and Western civilizations, profoundly shaping the region's
 192 historical legacy. Through peaceful interactions between traders and local communities, major world
 193 religions spread across the archipelago: Hinduism and Buddhism entered between the 1st and 5th
 194 centuries CE via contact with India (Calo, 2014), producing monumental legacies such as Borobudur (Ray,
 195 2019) and Prambanan (Irvine-Fortescue, 1978), while Islam expanded from the 13th century through
 196 maritime networks involving merchants from Gujarat, Persia, and the Arab world (Ricklefs, 1981), giving
 197 rise to early Islamic kingdoms such as Samudra Pasai (Lambourn, 2004) and Demak (Hasyim, 2021).
 198 Cultural exchange also enriched the arts and traditions of Nusantara, evident in temple architecture
 199 influenced by Indian aesthetics (Kowal, 2019), batik motifs shaped by Indian, Chinese, Arab, and
 200 European interactions [35], and traditional music and oral literature reflecting Middle Eastern (Capwell,
 201 1995) and South Asian influences (Jha, 2022). In addition, the Spice Route facilitated the diffusion of
 202 knowledge and technology in navigation (Meilink-Roelofs, 1962), agriculture (Jordan, 2015), medicine
 203 (Cho, 2022), and architecture, while local communities developed indigenous innovations such as the
 204 jong ship and the subak irrigation system (A. Gany, 2001). These long-standing interactions fostered
 205 shared values of tolerance and cooperation, exemplified by the inclusive Sultanate of Malacca (Mamat,
 206 2018) and local traditions of gotong royong and musyawarah, which later underpinned the national ideal
 207 of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and continue to shape Indonesia's pluralistic identity.
 208

209 **TABLE 1.** Dimensions of Cultural Exchange Along the Spice Route and Their Impact on Indonesian
 210 Civilization

Field	Brief Description
Religion	The spread of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam through peaceful trade routes, shaping local religious expressions and the spiritual landscape of Indonesia.
Arts and Traditions	Acculturation in architecture (temples), batik, music, and oral literature as a result of cultural encounters between local traditions and Indian, Chinese, Arab, and Persian influences
Knowledge	Exchange of knowledge in navigation, astronomy, medicine, agriculture, and maritime expertise, which developed into advanced local technological systems.
Technology and Architecture	Development of building techniques such as temples, irrigation systems, and large ships (jong); adaptation of foreign technologies combined with local innovations.
Social and Political Structure	Integration of religion into state systems (e.g., Samudra Pasai, Gowa-Tallo), as well as transformation of social structures and identities through intercultural interactions.

211 Continuous cross-cultural interactions along the Spice Route fostered a strong awareness of
 212 cultural diversity and shared values in Nusantara, encouraging tolerance, cooperation, and intensive
 213 social engagement that shaped a collective pluralistic consciousness. Local traditions such as gotong
 214 royong and *musyawarah*, rooted in early kingdoms and reinforced through trade-based interactions,
 215 played a crucial role in maintaining social harmony amid ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. After
 216 independence, these values continued to underpin national unity and the development of a democratic
 217 and modern state, demonstrating that Nusantara's collective identity—characterized by openness,
 218 adaptability, and tolerance—is both a historical legacy and a strategic asset. As a major arena of global
 219 trade and inter-civilizational exchange, the Spice Route profoundly influenced Indonesia's cultural
 220 transformation through the exchange of religion, art, knowledge, and social values, contributing to the

221 formation of national character and offering important insights into the role of cultural history in
222 shaping national identity.

223 *The spice route program: an initiative of the Indonesian government*

224 Growing recognition of the historical and cultural importance of the Spice Route has led the
225 Indonesian Government, through the Ministry of Culture, to develop the Spice Route Program as an
226 initiative to rediscover, preserve, and revitalize its strategic values while strengthening maritime culture
227 and cultural diplomacy (Syahroni et al., 2023). The Program integrates heritage preservation, education,
228 and diplomacy to reinforce national identity and expand Indonesia's international cultural influence,
229 while also supporting the nomination of the Spice Route as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site
230 (Kumoratih, 2022). To advance this goal, Kemendikbudristek has implemented research-based activities
231 and strengthened historical narratives through Programs such as Susur Kultur and Kembara Rempah
232 Nusantara (Itjen Kemendikbudristek, 2024), alongside the Muhibah Budaya Jalur Rempah maritime
233 expedition using KRI Dewaruci, which retraces key historical routes to foster youth engagement and
234 maritime awareness (Tempo, 2024). At the regional level, Cultural Heritage Preservation Centers (BPCB)
235 have formulated the 2021–2025 Action Plan as a shared framework for stakeholders, demonstrating a
236 coordinated and sustainable approach to safeguarding and utilizing Spice Route cultural heritage.

237 **DISCUSSION**

238 Advocacy for the Spice Route Program is essential to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness in
239 preserving cultural heritage and strengthening Indonesia's cultural diplomacy, while also increasing
240 public awareness and participation in recognizing and safeguarding the historical and cultural values of
241 the Spice Route.

242 *Enhancing public awareness through education, media outreach, and youth participation*

243 Public awareness raising (Kairišs, 2022) and broad community engagement (Bhatta et al., 2023)
244 are central to advocating the Spice Route Program, aimed at strengthening understanding of its global
245 significance and its role in Indonesia's cultural identity. Targeting academics, policymakers, and the wider
246 public through continuous education and participatory approaches, the Program promotes historical
247 literacy and cultural literacy. Integration into formal and non-formal education, supported by trainings,
248 seminars, public discussions and the strategic use of conventional and digital media for inclusive
249 dissemination, enhances outreach—particularly to younger audiences. Youth engagement through
250 competitions, cultural expeditions, and the Muhibah Jalur Rempah voyage ensures generational
251 continuity and reinforces public support, positioning advocacy as a foundation for UNESCO World
252 Heritage or Memory of the World nomination.

253 *Towards an integrated strategy for a sustainable spice route heritage ecosystem*

254 Towards sustainability, advocacy requires cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial coordination
255 (Phuong, 2022), led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in synergy with the
256 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, and Bappenas, alongside local
257 governments and grassroots stakeholders. Strong institutional collaboration, supported by research
258 institutions, universities, museums, and cultural communities, underpins effective governance and cultural
259 legitimacy. Internationally, advocacy strengthens Indonesia's cultural diplomacy by advancing the
260 nomination of the Spice Route under UNESCO frameworks (Springer, 2020), supported by rigorous
261 documentation and multidisciplinary research (Zanella et al., 2024). Integrating policy, institutional, and
262 diplomatic approaches, this strategy builds a resilient heritage ecosystem that reinforces national
263 recognition while advancing global acknowledgement and protection.

264 *Collaborative engagement among government, scholars, local communities, and creative industry stakeholders*

265 Multi-stakeholder collaboration ('Cross-Cultural Communication and SDG 17', 2025) is a central
266 pillar of the Spice Route Program, reflecting its cross-regional and cross-sectoral character. The
267 government led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in coordination with the
268

269 Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provides strategic
270 direction, regulatory support, and inter-agency coordination. Academia contributes through research and
271 educational collaboration for cultural heritage sustainability strengthening the scientific legitimacy of the
272 Spice Route narrative as a civilizational corridor.

273 Local cultural communities (Ćwik, 2020; Rosyiidiani et al., 2025) play a vital role in safeguarding
274 living knowledge and traditions through participatory, locally grounded initiatives, while creative
275 economy actors revitalize the narrative via product innovation and cultural storytelling across culinary,
276 design, performing arts, and digital media. Together, the synergy between government, academia,
277 communities, and creative industries transforms the Spice Route advocacy into an inclusive cultural
278 movement that reinforces national identity, cultural diplomacy, and global recognition.

279 *Policy integration within national frameworks: medium-term development plan (RPJMN), cultural* 280 *strategy, and international cultural diplomacy*

281 The Spice Route Program aligns with the 2025–2029 National Development Agenda, particularly
282 the eighth agenda on Social, Cultural, and Ecological Resilience, by strengthening national identity and
283 cultural resilience through the reconstruction of inter-civilizational interactions (Ministry of National
284 Development Planning/Bappenas, 2023). Within the National Cultural Strategy following the 2018
285 Indonesian Cultural Congress (Yosephine, 2018), the Program functions as an instrument for revitalizing
286 collective memory and advancing cultural diplomacy, with potential integration into cultural planning,
287 education, and preservation incentives.

288 At the international level, advocacy positions the Program within Indonesia’s foreign
289 policy through cultural diplomacy, including participation in UNESCO and regional forums, while cross-
290 ministerial synchronization ensures alignment of sectoral policies in education, tourism, and the creative
291 economy. Strengthening legal and institutional foundations through new or revised regulations would
292 further anchor the Spice Route Program as a strategic cultural and maritime civilizational initiative.

293 *Evidence-based support through research: historical records, textual manuscripts, archival sources,* 294 *and material artefacts*

295 An effective advocacy strategy for the Spice Route Program depends on strong data and
296 scientific research (Holoborodko et al., 2024), supported by systematic documentation from primary and
297 secondary sources that validate Nusantara’s central role in global trade between the 5th and 17th
298 centuries, thereby strengthening UNESCO nomination claims. Research on ancient manuscripts and
299 colonial archives from the Netherlands, as well as Portugal, Britain, and Spain is essential for
300 reconstructing accurate, transnational narratives of trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange.

301 Archaeological evidence from ancient ports and trade sites further reinforces this narrative
302 through material remains integrated into museums and digital exhibitions. Overall, data-driven research
303 and documentation form the core of advocacy, requiring collaboration among government, academia,
304 and research communities to support UNESCO recognition and sustainable heritage preservation.

305 *Registering the spice route with UNESCO: strategic directions for advocacy*

306 The following section outlines strategic directions for advocating the nomination of the Spice
307 Routes to UNESCO through a structured approach that integrates evidence, argumentation, and
308 diplomacy.

- 309 a. Key Considerations in the Nomination Process. The nomination of the Spice Routes as a World
310 Heritage site (World Heritage Convention, UNECCO, 2025) and within the Memory of the World
311 Register (Springer, 2020) requires strong, evidence-based advocacy demonstrating Outstanding
312 Universal Value rooted in Nusantara’s role in global maritime trade. The routes may be proposed as
313 a cultural route [86], or a serial nomination (Barbieri et al., 2023), supported by archaeological sites
314 and documentary heritage, with public engagement and a unifying narrative strengthening cultural
315 diplomacy.
- 316 b. Indonesia’s Evidence and Readiness. Indonesia’s readiness is supported by archaeological (He, 2024)
317 and archival evidence demonstrating universal value (Orlov, 2025), government commitment through
318 the Spice Routes Program, and international scholarly networks. Contributions from research

- 319 institutions and universities further strengthen the alignment of evidence, policy, and global
320 cooperation for UNESCO submission.
- 321 c. Challenges and Opportunities: Cross-National Cultural Diplomacy. Key challenges lie in aligning
322 shared historical narratives among connected countries (Schmidtke, 2023; Scott, 2020) and balancing
323 national and universal values. At the same time, these challenges offer opportunities to enhance
324 Indonesia's cultural standing through diplomacy, education, exhibitions, and international
325 partnerships.
- 326 d. Regional and International Synergy as Soft Diplomacy. The nomination functions as a platform for
327 regional and international synergy through culture-based soft diplomacy (Terzioğlu, 2022).
328 Cooperation with neighboring regions and UNESCO supports site preservation, management, and
329 broader opportunities in tourism, the creative economy, and research collaboration.
- 330 e. Alternative Advocacy: A Dual Strategy for World Heritage and Memory of the World. A dual strategy
331 combining World Heritage (World Heritage Convention, UNECCO, 2025) and Memory of the World
332 (Edmondson, 2020) pathways integrates physical heritage of universal value (Munjeri, 2004) with
333 documentary records (Chanan, 2004). This approach mobilizes diverse stakeholders and positions the
334 Spice Routes as a shared heritage of humanity and a model for inclusive, sustainable heritage
335 management.

336 *Theoretical and practical implications of the research findings*

337 The findings of this study have significant theoretical and practical implications for the
338 advancement of cultural heritage preservation and cultural diplomacy scholarship. Theoretically, the
339 study enriches the framework of heritage diplomacy by proposing an integrated analytical approach that
340 connects archaeological and documentary evidence, institutional governance, and international
341 diplomatic strategies within the context of transnational heritage nomination. This approach broadens
342 the understanding of cultural routes not merely as historical legacies, but as contemporary strategic
343 assets that actively shape global narratives and inter-civilizational relations.

344 Practically, the findings provide an operational reference for policymakers, cultural institutions,
345 and diplomatic actors in designing UNESCO nomination advocacy strategies that are evidence-based,
346 cross-sectoral coordinated, and responsive to the dynamics of shared heritage claims. These implications
347 underscore the importance of national policy alignment, strengthened cross-ministerial coordination, and
348 sustained international collaboration as essential prerequisites for the successful management and global
349 recognition of the Spice Route as a World Heritage property.

350 **CONCLUSION**

351 The Spice Route Program is not merely a reconstruction of historical trade pathways, but a
352 revival of the maritime civilizational heritage of Nusantara as a sustainable cultural force. This route
353 served as a vital nexus for the exchange of commodities, values, technologies, and knowledge between
354 the peoples of the archipelago and various nations across the globe. Through a cross-sectoral approach,
355 the Program underscores the importance of engaging local communities, fostering institutional synergy,
356 and promoting cultural diplomacy—ensuring that heritage preservation goes beyond artefacts and
357 remains alive through practice, education, and national narratives. The Government of Indonesia has also
358 actively advanced international recognition of the Spice Route's strategic value by nominating it to
359 UNESCO, both under the World Heritage List and the Memory of the World Program, as a means of
360 securing global protection and acknowledgement of Indonesia's maritime cultural history.

361 Furthermore, the integration of the Spice Route Program into the national development
362 framework—particularly within the 2025–2029 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN)—
363 demonstrates its strategic relevance to the agendas of social, cultural, and ecological resilience. As a
364 history- and community-based initiative, the Spice Route holds significant potential to strengthen
365 national identity, promote inter-cultural and interfaith tolerance, and foster a just, prosperous society in
366 harmony with nature. The submission to UNESCO reinforces the government's commitment to
367 positioning the Spice Route as a world cultural heritage, not only preserved for the present generation
368 but also bequeathed to future ones. This Program thus constitutes not merely an act of historical

369 preservation, but a cultural strategy for shaping an inclusive and globally competitive future for
370 Indonesia.

371 This study makes an academic contribution by advancing heritage diplomacy scholarship through
372 an integrated analytical framework that links policy analysis, cultural routes, and UNESCO mechanisms,
373 offering empirically grounded insights into how transboundary heritage can function as a strategic
374 cultural asset in contemporary international relations.

375 Looking forward, future research may explore comparative analyses with other transnational
376 cultural routes, assess the long-term socio-economic impacts of heritage-based diplomacy on local
377 communities, and examine digital heritage strategies for expanding global engagement. Academically,
378 this study advances heritage diplomacy scholarship by offering an integrated analytical framework that
379 demonstrates how transboundary cultural heritage can be mobilized as a strategic asset in contemporary
380 international relations.

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