

Development and Utilization Strategies for *Kota Lama* as a Tourism Destination in Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi Province, Indonesia

Selvi Marlina¹, Nasrudin Suyuti², Syahrin³, La Aso⁴, Bahtiar⁵

¹Student, Postgraduate Program in Cultural Studies, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

²Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

³Department of Archeology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

⁴Department of Language and Literature, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

⁵Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: La Aso (la_aso@yahoo.co.id)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20250724>

ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify the potentials of Kendari's *Kota Lama* and formulate the development strategy in order it can be a historical and cultural tourism destination. The city boasts colonial relics, distinctive architecture, local cultural diversity, and a strategic location. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with observation, interviews, and documentation methods, the study analyses data qualitatively and applies the SWOT model to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The results indicate that the Kendari's *Kota Lama* has great potentials as a historical tourism destination with sustainable and participatory development. The proposed strategies are carried out by preserving the historical buildings through adaptive reuse, empowering local communities, developing heritage trail-based educational tourism, and utilizing digital media for promotion and interpretation. The study recommends the availability of area protection regulations, multi-party collaboration, and an integrated tourism development master plan to make Kendari's *Kota Lama* a leading tourist destination having educational, economic, and cultural value.

Keywords: Kota Lama Kendari, colonial remains, tourism development, local culture

INTRODUCTION

The *Kota Lama* (meaning *old town*) in Kendari is one of the cultural and historical assets that have important value in the social, economic, and architectural development of the town. The town consists of various colonial relics, including hospitals, prisons, warehouses, churches, and defence systems such as cannons and artillery batteries, which serve as authentic evidence of the history of Kendari City from the Dutch colonial era to independence. The existence of this cultural heritage shows that the Kendari's *Kota Lama* has great potentials to be developed as a historical and cultural tourism destination.

In various cities in Indonesia, the development of historical areas as tourist destinations has had a positive impact, such as revitalizing the local economy, preserving culture, and increasing city identity. Real examples can be seen in the development of the *Kota Lama* in Semarang and the *Kota Tua* in Jakarta which have been successful in attracting tourists and increasing the creative economy.^[1] Something similar is very possible to be

applied in Kendari City, especially in Kendari's *Kota Lama* area which has unique architecture, high historical value, and a strategic location in the heart of the city.

The reality shows that the management and development of Kendari's *Kota Lama* have been carried out optimally. Many historical buildings have been converted without proper conservation planning, tourism supporting infrastructure is still limited, and public awareness of cultural heritage preservation is still low. This condition is exacerbated by the lack of specific regulations and policies governing the sustainable use of cultural heritage areas.^[2]

From a socio-economic perspective, developing the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area as a tourist destination can provide new job opportunities, encourage the growth of micro-enterprises in the culinary and craft sectors, and strengthen the identity of the local community. Active community participation is key to maintaining the sustainability of the development of this area, especially in the context of community-based tourism by adopting local wisdom.^[3]

Academically, this research is important to fill the gap in studies that have so far focused more on historical aspects alone, without integrating concrete strategies in the development and use of cultural heritage areas as tourist destinations. Therefore, this study aims to formulate a strategy for the development and utilization of Kendari's *Kota Lama Kota* area as a sustainable tourist destination, by considering aspects of conservation, community empowerment, and strengthening infrastructure based on the 4A principles (attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services) in destination management.^[4]

With a holistic and participatory approach, it is hoped that the results of this study can provide a real contribution to the development of policies, management models, and improve the quality of tourist destinations in Kendari City.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to deeply understand the development and utilization strategy of the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area as a culture-based tourist destination. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore social realities, perceptions, and practices of preserving and utilizing historical areas through direct interaction with informants and observations of physical objects in the field.^[5]

Data collection techniques are carried out through:

- Observation, both participatory and non-participatory, of the physical condition of the area and community activities around the historical site;
- In-depth interviews with key informants such as local government officials, tourism actors, community leaders, and tourists;
- Documentation, in the form of photos, historical archives, and regional development planning documents;
- Literature study, to support the theoretical framework and strengthen data analysis through relevant academic and regulatory references.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. To support strategic analysis, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis was used, which helped identify the potential and challenges of regional development, as well as formulate management strategies based on real and sustainable conditions.^[6]

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The potentials of *Kota Lama* of Kendari area as a tourist destination

Kendari's *Kota Lama* area holds a treasure. Behind the old buildings that seem ordinary to some lies a long story about the journey of Kendari City from the colonial era to the present. Most people are not yet aware that this area, which is administratively included in Kandai village, is the forerunner of the

modern city that is now the centre of Southeast Sulawesi Province. From the results of this study, it was revealed that Kendari's *Kota Lama* area has various superior potentials that are very worthy of being developed into attractive tourist attractions, as well as being a competitive advantage for the tourism sector in this region.

The first and most striking potential is the historical value of this area. The Kendari's *Kota Lama* is not just an old residential area, it is a space that records various historical traces, starting from the Dutch colonial era, the Colonial Hospital (Kandai Health Center), the Colonial Prison, the Garnizoens Battalion Detachment Official Residence, the Deputy Chairman of the Southeast Sulawesi DPRD Official Residence (ex. Dutch Controleur House), Dutch Cemetery, Chinese School, Pesangrahan Building, Water Reserve, Eye Battery, Kendari Container Port Cannon, and Warehouse are not only physical relics, but also symbols of the social and political dynamics that once occurred. The story of how this area used to be the centre of colonial government, a place for commodity exchange, and a strategic military route, can be a strong narrative in a historical tourism package.

For tourists, especially students and researchers, this area offers an authentic and in-depth educational experience. In addition to its strong history, the potential of local culture is also an important attraction. Kendari City is known as a meeting place for various ethnic groups, such as Tolaki, Buton, Muna, Bugis, and several groups of immigrants from outside Sulawesi. This diversity is not only reflected in customs and language, but also in the form of traditional houses, settlement patterns, and the social life of its people. Interview results show that there are still a number of families who inherit local cultural practices such as making Tolaki woven fabrics, cooking traditional cuisine, and preserving folklore that has been passed down from generation to generation. All of these are cultural assets

that have great potential to be packaged into a cultural tourism experience.

The architecture of the area is also a visual wealth that should not be ignored. Most of the old buildings in Kendari's *Kota Lama* still maintain their original forms from the colonial period. Although some have been damaged or renovated, the character of European tropical architecture is still very much felt with high roofs, large windows, wooden lattices, and elegant symmetrical shapes. This kind of architecture has high aesthetic value and is able to create a nostalgic atmosphere for tourists. If revitalization is carried out while maintaining the authenticity of the structure, this area could be a paradise for photography, architecture, and history lovers.

Another very prominent potential is the very strategic geographical location of the area. The Kendari's *Kota Lama* is located right on the coast of Kendari Bay, just a few minutes from the center of government and the port. With the presence of the Bahteramas Bridge, access to this area has become much faster and more convenient. Its location in the middle of city activities provides a great advantage because it is easily accessible to tourists from various directions. Its position facing the sea also opens up opportunities for the development of integrated marine tourism, such as bay tours, historical piers, or sunset view spots that blend with the historical narrative of the area.

From a social and community perspective, community support for tourism development in this area is very large. Based on the results of the interview, the community showed enthusiasm to be involved if this area is truly developed into a historical and cultural tourist attraction. They even have many oral stories that have never been formally documented, for instance, stories about the Japanese occupation, trading activities in the old port, to the origins of the naming of several important points in the area. This kind of support is crucial because successful

tourism development always requires community participation as guardians and

main actors in the field.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1.a, b. Afternoon and evening view of Kendari City (Source: Selvi Marlina, 2025)

The outlook of Kendari City in the afternoon and evening

One aspect that becomes the main attraction of the Kendari's *Kota Lama* as a tourist destination is its visual power and historical atmosphere, especially at dusk approaching night. Based on the results of field observations conducted at 17.30 to 20.00 WITA (Central Indonesian Time), this area experiences a very distinctive transformation of the atmosphere. When the sun begins to set, orange light seeps between the gaps of the colonial buildings that stand firmly, creating a romantic and calming silhouette, the roads that curve smoothly follow the natural contours of the coastal area, with old shady trees on the left and right sides, strengthening the aesthetic impression of the area as a space that stores historical memories. The golden yellow light of street lamps falls on the dull walls of old buildings, creating a classic impression that seems to invite visitors to walk down the hall of time. Based on the results of an interview with one of the informants (Mr. Yuda Mifta Hadin, 40), a community figure who is active in the creative community of Kendari City, he said that: "In the afternoon, Kendari City looks alive, especially in the waterfront areas such as the City Park, Kendari Bay Platform, and Kendari Bay Bridge.

Many residents come just to take a walk, exercise, or hang out while enjoying the

sunset. The color of the sky is beautiful with orange and purple hues, and the silhouettes of fishing boats or ferries passing by also add to the romantic atmosphere. Then, at night, it is also crowded, especially on weekends. The city lights start to turn on, including on bridges and city parks. In some areas, such as the MTQ area and Kendari beach, there are numerous food vendors, making the atmosphere lively. But on some main roads, sometimes the street lights are still lacking, so it is a bit dark and needs to be repaired. But overall, the night in Kendari is quite comfortable to relax and the difference in atmosphere is that during the day it is hot and tends to be quiet because people do more activities indoors. But in the afternoon until night, the city starts to become active. The atmosphere is more relaxed, and people come out of the house and feel more alive."

The results of the interviews above reveal that there are different visual dynamics and social activities between the afternoon and evening in this city. In the afternoon, Kendari City displays a more live and aesthetic atmosphere, especially in coastal areas such as the City Park, Kendari Bay Platform, and Kendari Bay Bridge. The sunset phenomenon, accompanied by gradations of sky colours such as orange and purple, is a visual attraction that creates a romantic and calm atmosphere. The dominant community activities at this time

are recreation, light sports, and relaxing, indicating that public spaces in Kendari have quite important social functions in the afternoon.

At night, Kendari City still shows a fairly high level of activity, especially in strategic areas such as the MTQ arena and Kendari Beach. City lighting is an important element that enlivens the night atmosphere, including street lights, parks, and bridges. However, Enang also noted that not all areas receive adequate lighting, resulting in an imbalance in the perception of public safety and comfort. Nevertheless, informal economic activities such as night culinary thrive and become a magnet for residents and tourists. Overall, Kendari City has an urban life rhythm that changes according to time, with afternoon and evening being the peak of community social activity. The visual outlook of the city in the two time

periods not only reflects the aesthetic aspect but also shows the dynamic social and economic functions of the city space.

In this landscape, tourism potential does not only rely on the structure of the building, but also on the visual and emotional experiences offered. This is in line with the concept of urban heritage tourism, where the value of spatial experience and historical narrative in the old city space are the main factors that shape tourist satisfaction.^[7] Thus, the experience of traveling to Kendari's *Kota Lama* can be designed to involve multisensory aspects: the visuals of the night lighting, the sound of the wind and the sound of the nearby sea, and the aroma of old wood and coffee from small shops on the side of the road. This makes the area not just a passive tourist attraction, but a living and dialogical space between the past and the present.



(a)



(b)

Figure 2.a, b. Gate in the Toronipa Tourist Area (Source: Selvi Marlina, 2025)

Front view of the Gate of Toronipa Tourism Area

As a relevant comparison, the Toronipa area on the east coast of Kendari has succeeded in building a strong visual symbol through the presence of a large gate that reads "Welcome to the Toronipa Tourism Area." This gate is not only an architectural element, but also a representation of the identity of the tourism area that leaves a first impression on visitors. The Kendari's *Kota Lama* has great potential to adopt a similar approach, of course with artistic adjustments

based on history. For example, through the construction of a colonial-style entrance gate, classic signage, 1930s-era street lights, and thematic murals depicting the history of this port city during the Dutch colonial period and the Japanese occupation. These visual elements can be strengthened with a place branding approach, namely forming a city image based on authentic local characters. The epithet of the Kendari's *Kota Lama* is "Time City" or "Kendari Tempo Doeloe" and will make it easier to convey the area's narrative to tourists. This

visual branding can be complemented by the use of technology such as augmented reality (AR) to show the original form of past

buildings through tourists' gadgets—creating a more imaginative and participatory historical experience.



(a) (b)
Figure 3.a, b. Coffee Shop (Source: Selvi Marlina, 2025)

Coffee shops represent the emergence of new social spaces that are formed organically by the community. This phenomenon proves that the Kendari's *Kota Lama* still functions as an adaptive living space. One example is the existence of a simple coffee shop that stands in the yard of a former old building, surrounded by large trees and a small garden that grows naturally. This shop was built using local materials such as bamboo, ironwood, and corrugated zinc roofs, and has become a favourite place for students and young people to gather, discuss, or enjoy the afternoon atmosphere. Visitors to the shop not only come from Kendari, but also from outside the city, attracted by the unique atmosphere offered by this area.

In an effort to explore the visual potential and experience of the Kendari's *Kota Lama* space, the researcher conducted an interview with a micro-entrepreneur and regular visitor, namely the manager of a coffee shop located in an open area near the remains of the Anno water reservoir of 1928. This coffee shop is located on higher ground than the surrounding settlements, providing a direct panorama of Kendari Bay and the landscape of the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area. The resource person, who is familiarly called Kak Rangga (29 years old), said that

the afternoon approaching evening is the most interesting moment for visitors. "In the afternoon before sunset, the view is extraordinary. From here we can see the Kendari Bridge which is lit up at night, it looks very beautiful. Many young people and visitors from outside the city come just to take pictures in this place, sometimes I just sit still while watching the city lights from up here, it feels like I'm not in Kendari. It would be a shame if this view was not made an official tourist spot."

This statement contains a deep emotional dimension, where the atmosphere and visuals of the area give rise to a spatial experience that goes beyond everyday reality. The phrase "it feels like I'm not in Kendari" reflects the phenomenon of place detachment, namely a spatial experience that allows someone to imagine a new or alternative identity of a place. This opens up opportunities to reimagine the Kendari's *Kota Lama* as a tourist destination based on visual experiences.

Field findings show that the visual landscape of the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area facing Kendari Bay, with the background of the Kendari Bay Bridge and old buildings that still survive, is the main attraction for visitors. Many of them, especially the younger generation and domestic tourists,

use this area as a place to take pictures or enjoy the panorama from afternoon to evening. This phenomenon confirms that the area has great potential as a visual landscape-based tourist destination that has not been officially developed.

The transformation of the function of space around the Water reservoir also reflects the dynamics of urban space adaptation. Previously used as a technical infrastructure for providing clean water, this area has now developed into a social and recreational space. The independently managed coffee shop is a real example of the reticulation of the meaning of urban space, where the utilitarian function shifts to a symbolic and tourism function. This is in line with the adaptive reuse approach in managing historical areas, namely giving new functions to old spaces or buildings without eliminating their historical and architectural value.^[8]

From an economic aspect, Kak Rangga said that his daily income ranges from IDR 500,000 to IDR 750,000, especially on weekends. This shows that the use of historical space for micro-enterprises has real economic potential. However, this activity is still informal and has not been included in the city spatial planning system. Kak Rangga expressed his concerns about zoning violations or ignoring conservation principles if activities like this do not receive guidance and supervision from the local government. This interview reinforces the view that the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area has visual and social power that can be developed as an experience-based tourism destination. The viewpoint around the Water reservoir has a strategic position as part of a visual trail that combines the experience of the city landscape and historical narrative in an immersive manner.

To realize this potential, planned management and public policy support are needed—including zoning arrangements for cultural heritage areas, incentives for local business actors, and historical conservation education programs. The synergy between visual conservation, community

participation, and innovation in utilizing old city space through adaptive reuse is the key to developing inclusive, sustainable, and economically valuable cultural tourism for the community.

The utilization of empty spaces or old buildings needs to be directed into an adaptive reuse framework, namely the preservation of cultural heritage by providing new functions without eliminating its historical and architectural value.^[8] For example, port warehouses can be converted into maritime arts and culture centers, old houses can function as history galleries, and open spaces can be developed as heritage-themed community parks. This approach allows for a symbiosis between conservation and economic development, which preserves the area while providing direct benefits to the surrounding community.

This strategy cannot be implemented without supporting policies and regulations, such as cultural heritage zoning regulations, incentive programs for small business actors, and socialization of the importance of conservation to the community. The absence of these policies can cause damage to historic buildings due to conversion without conservation planning, such as what happened to the Water reservoir Anno 1928, which is now used as a business space without adequate historical consideration.

Thus, the development of the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area must be seen as a multi-aspect project involving visual, historical, economic, social, and cultural elements. The potential for night time aesthetics, visual symbolization of the area, local community participation, and the implementation of adaptive reuse strategies must be synergized comprehensively. Through this approach, the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area can develop as an attractive, sustainable, and soulful cultural tourism destination. The main strengths of this area include high historical value, its strategic location in the city centre, and the existence of colonial heritage infrastructure that is still quite intact. The main weaknesses include the lack of

supporting tourism facilities such as historical information, signs, information centres, and the lack of promotion of the area.

Opportunities that can be utilized include the increasing trend of historical and cultural tourism, policy support from the government through the Cultural Heritage Decree, and opportunities for collaboration with local communities and creative economy actors. Meanwhile, threats include uncontrolled land conversion, building damage due to a lack of conservation, and lack of public awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage. In addition, local community participation in the development of the area is still relatively low. Communities around the area do not fully understand the economic and social potential of developing history-based tourism. The lack of community-based activities and the absence of an integrated management model are the main inhibiting factors.

From an institutional aspect, there is no integrated tourism promotion and management strategy. The local government does not yet have a roadmap for developing historical tourism destinations in the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area. In fact, the potential to develop heritage trails, night tourism, and digitizing historical information is very large to increase the attractiveness of the area.

The development strategy of the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area should be directed at:

1. Physical revitalization and adaptive conservation of historical buildings;
2. Improvement of tourism infrastructure such as pedestrians, thematic lighting, historical information boards, and public toilets;
3. Empowerment of local communities in the form of training for tour guides, craftsmen, and creative economy actors;
4. Strengthening digital promotion, such as the use of QR codes, social media, and virtual tours;
5. Multi-stakeholder collaboration between government, communities, academics,

and the private sector for sustainable management.

These findings support the importance of an integrated approach in developing the Kendari's *Kota Lama* area as a historical tourism destination that is not only visually appealing but also able to provide economic and social benefits for the local community.

CONCLUSION

Kendari's *Kota Lama* area has enormous potential to be developed as a cultural and historical tourism destination. This potential is reflected in the existence of various colonial architectural remains that still stand, such as colonial hospitals, prisons, warehouses, water reservoirs, defence cannons, and old churches. The existence of these remains shows high historical value and unique visual appeal, which can be a magnet for local and foreign tourists. In addition to historical value, the potential of the area is also supported by its strategic location in the centre of Kendari City, relatively good accessibility, and the diverse and inclusive socio-cultural background of the community. Another prominent potential is the support of government policies through the designation of several buildings as cultural heritage, as well as the conformity with the trend of history-based and educational tourism that is now growing rapidly. However, this potential has not been managed optimally due to various obstacles, such as low community participation, conversion of buildings without conservation, minimal tourism facilities, and suboptimal promotion and governance of the area. The development strategies needed include adaptive conservation of buildings, increasing amenities and accessibility, active community involvement, digital promotion, and integration of policies between institutions.

With a value-based approach and SWOT analysis, the formulated strategy is expected to be able to make the Kendari's *Kota Lama* a cultural tourism destination that not only maintains the sustainability of historical

heritage, but also encourages local economic growth, strengthens city identity, and improves the welfare of the local community in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

Declaration by Authors

Acknowledgement: None

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Sedyawati, E. (2007). Pusaka Budaya dan Tantangan Global. Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
2. Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 11 Tahun 2010 tentang Cagar Budaya.
3. Timothy, D. J., & Tosun, C. (2003). Arguments for Community Participation in the Tourism Development Process. *Journal of Tourism Studies*, 14(1), 2–15.
4. Cooper, C., Fletcher, J., Fyall, A., Gilbert, D., & Wanhill, S. (2008). *Tourism: Principles and Practice* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

5. Moleong, L. J. (2019). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif (Edisi Revisi)*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
6. Rangkuti, F. (2014). *Analisis SWOT Teknik Membedah Kasus Bisnis*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
7. Ashworth, G. J., & Tunbridge, J. E. (2000). *The Tourist-Historic City: Retrospect and Prospect of Managing the Heritage City*. Elsevier.
8. Plevoets, B., & Van Cleempoel, K. (2011). Adaptive reuse as a strategy towards conservation of cultural heritage: a literature review. *WIT Transactions on The Built Environment*, 118, 155–164.

How to cite this article: Selvi Marlina, Nasrudin Suyuti, Syahrin, La Aso, Bahtiar. Development and utilization strategies for *Kota Lama* as a tourism destination in Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2025; 12(7): 225-233. DOI: [10.52403/ijrr.20250724](https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20250724)
