

Revitalizing Cultural Heritage Buildings to Enrich Urban Tourism Experiences: A Qualitative Case Study in Jakarta

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Abstract

This study explores how the use of Cultural Heritage Buildings (CHBs) in Jakarta contributes to enriching the experiential dimensions of urban heritage tourism. While the conservation of cultural assets has traditionally been viewed through a preservationist lens, this study adopts a qualitative approach to examine how these spaces are creatively revitalized into experiential venues that appeal to modern urban tourists. By employing descriptive case studies of six iconic CHBs—Pos Bloc, Sarinah, Paser Baroe, Gedung Kesenian Jakarta, Monumen Nasional, and Museum Nasional Jakarta—this research analyzes how sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational experiences are co-constructed through strategic reuse and experiential marketing. Data were collected through site observations, expert documentations, and interpretive analysis of urban narratives. Findings show that the unique combination of historical ambiance, commercial adaptation, and cultural storytelling creates a multidimensional experience that goes beyond visual aesthetics. Jakarta's approach demonstrates how CHBs can serve both as heritage anchors and platforms for innovative urban cultural expression. The study concludes with recommendations for urban tourism developers and heritage managers to align cultural sustainability with tourism innovation.

Keywords:

Cultural heritage buildings, urban tourism, experiential marketing, qualitative research, Jakarta



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INTRODUCTION

Background

The city of Jakarta, with its rich tapestry of colonial and multicultural history, presents a distinctive opportunity for leveraging Cultural Heritage Buildings (CHBs) in the context of urban tourism. As urbanization accelerates, Jakarta faces the dual challenge of preserving its historical identity while adapting these structures for contemporary use. This necessity is underscored by the growing significance of adaptive reuse—a practice that extends the lifespan of historical architecture while enhancing its economic and social value through innovative redevelopment strategies (Fajarwati, 2023; Rudan, 2023).

The adaptive reuse of buildings in Jakarta serves as a vital strategy for revitalizing urban areas while respecting historical narratives. Recent studies underline the benefits of transforming historical sites into functional spaces, such as cafés and cultural hubs, which promote community engagement and economic activity. This approach fosters a "third place," a communal space that blends nostalgia with modern requirements, thereby bridging the past and present (Fajarwati, 2023; , Alauddin et al., 2022). However, potential pitfalls of gentrification may arise from such developments, requiring careful navigation to ensure that local communities are not displaced in the pursuit of economic regeneration. Balancing development aspirations with the preservation of cultural identity poses a significant yet critical challenge (Man, 2023; , Turohman et al., 2024).

Incorporating sustainability principles, the design and implementation of adaptive reuse projects should emphasize environmental, social, and economic dimensions, aligning with broader urban regeneration efforts. Evidence suggests that adaptive reuse can enhance local economies by creating vibrant spaces that attract both residents and tourists, thereby contributing to a city's overall appeal (Selim et al., 2023; , Lemos & Donoso, 2023). Transforming CHBs into accessible community spaces preserves heritage and revitalizes neighborhoods, encouraging social interaction and positioning tourism as a viable economic driver (Ariffin et al., 2020; , Aziz, 2020).

The successful execution of adaptive reuse projects in Jakarta necessitates a comprehensive framework that considers the historical significance of buildings alongside the functional needs of modern urban life. A multifaceted approach involving diverse stakeholders—local governments, architects, and community groups—can cultivate a holistic framework for assessing the suitability and potential of various heritage sites (Mohamed & Alauddin, 2021). Public engagement in the adaptive reuse process ensures that redevelopment projects resonate with local identities while fostering a sense of ownership within the community (Kahvecioğlu & Selçuk, 2023). This reinforces the notion that preserving cultural heritage is not merely about maintaining structures but about enriching the living experience and fostering community resilience in urban landscapes.

In conclusion, Jakarta's heritage buildings can play an instrumental role in defining the city's urban identity and enhancing its attractiveness as a tourism destination. The adaptive reuse of CHBs, if approached thoughtfully and inclusively, can harmonize the relationship between historical preservation and modern functionality, ultimately leading to sustainable urban development (Guo et al., 2020; , Paulino et al., 2023). Critical to this process is the acknowledgment of both the cultural narratives that these buildings represent and the contemporary needs of the urban populace.

Literature Review

The integration of Cultural Heritage Buildings (CHBs) into Urban Heritage Tourism (UHT) reflects a scholarly consensus that views heritage as a catalyst for enriching tourist experiences rather than merely a static artifact of the past. This perspective promotes the idea that cultural heritage is an ongoing narrative involving active engagement with the past, as elucidated in the literature (Ponce & Rius-Sorolla, 2023). Additionally, the multisensory engagement sought by postmodern tourists enhances their interactions with historical contexts in urban settings (Cilkin & Çizel, 2021). This synthesis suggests that the vitality of urban heritage tourism derives from its ability to facilitate deep, emotive encounters, enhancing the overall tourist experience.

Further elucidating this connection is Schmitt's Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) framework, which provides a comprehensive lens to understand tourist interactions with CHBs. According to Schmitt, the SEMs encompass dimensions such as sense, feel, think, act, and relate, culminating in unique experiential engagements at heritage sites (Yang et al., 2023). The aesthetic dimensions of architecture, complemented by the atmospheric qualities of their environments, play essential roles in crafting these experiences. Research indicates that when tourists engage with the stories embedded in CHBs and have opportunities for physical participation, they cultivate more profound connections to the locale (Yao et al., 2020).

Despite the recognized importance of CHBs in shaping urban identities, there is a gap in the literature concerning tourists' real-time perceptions and experiences of these spaces. Studies highlight the significance of CHBs in urban contexts; however, they do not address tourists' subjective experiences as they traverse these historical landscapes (Madeira et al., 2023; GENÇ & Genc, 2022). This study aims to bridge that gap through qualitative research methodologies, focusing on how CHBs are curated as "experience spaces" that harmoniously blend conservation, consumer engagement, and cultural interpretation.

The discourse surrounding Urban Heritage Tourism increasingly emphasizes the role of storytelling. The aesthetic experience derived from cultural heritage sites often intertwines with authenticity, shaping tourist satisfaction and overall engagement. Research corroborates the assertion that existential authenticity enhances tourists' aesthetic experiences and reinforces emotional connections to the heritage sites they visit (Lee et al., 2021; Ramírez-Guerrero et al., 2021).

Moreover, studies have indicated the significant dimensions of sustainability in tourism, noting that heritage not only serves as an attraction but also embodies an underlying socio-cultural fabric impacting local populations. A holistic understanding of UHT must thus consider the perspectives and cultural sustainability associated with such heritage spaces (Uslu et al., 2023). Consequently, the

collective narratives surrounding CHBs become vital in fostering tourism that is economically sustainable as well as socially responsible and culturally sensitive.

Elshaer et al. contribute to this discourse by analyzing the influence of adaptive reuse practices on heritage houses, establishing a direct link between cultural heritage preservation and enhanced tourism appeal through innovative methodologies. Adaptive reuse of historic buildings often leads to a unique fusion of the past with contemporary tourism strategies, facilitating memorable experiences that resonate with visitors while maintaining the essence of cultural significance (Connell et al., 2021; Menor-Campos et al., 2020).

The integration of technology, such as Augmented Reality (AR) and other digital tools, is also worth exploring within this context. These mechanisms are increasingly utilized to enhance visitor experiences at cultural heritage sites, particularly through immersive storytelling that bridges traditional interpretations and modern tourist expectations (Anuar et al., 2021). Such technologies foster interactivity and cater to the evolving demands of today's travelers, allowing for a more inclusive engagement with cultural heritage.

It is critical to recognize societal trends influencing urban tourism, including generational shifts in values and preferences, as highlighted in recent studies. Research underscores the need for heritage sites to appeal to younger audiences through innovative storytelling methods and interactive experiences (Karacaoğlu, 2024; Riyadi et al., 2021). Engagement with cultural heritage, therefore, transforms into a dialogue that respects historical narratives while innovatively reconstructing them to cater to contemporary sensibilities.

Furthermore, the interplay between heritage and tourism management is increasingly important, as local identities and place attachment influence tourists' experiences (Satrya et al., 2024). This relationship highlights the bidirectional impacts of tourism on cultural sites and local communities, reinforcing findings that suggest a mutual enhancement of cultural authenticity and tourist engagement through informed stakeholder collaboration (Elshaer et al., 2022).

Focusing on tourists' emotional experiences, research posits that positive emotions significantly expand visitors' attentiveness and engagement levels, transforming their interactions with heritage into meaningful cultural dialogues. These emotional connections are further enhanced by the stories embedded in the historical contexts of CHBs, serving as essential conduits for tourists navigating cultural identity complexities through their travel experiences (Yuan & Vui, 2023).

In summary, the exploration of CHBs within UHT serves as a vital focal point for understanding urban tourism's implications for cultural identity, engagement, and sustainability. As scholars continue to unpack these dimensions through rigorous qualitative methodologies, it becomes increasingly clear that CHBs are not just historic structures; they are dynamic entities that shape and are shaped by the interactions they foster with contemporary tourists.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to explore in depth how Cultural Heritage Buildings (CHBs) in Jakarta contribute to the experiential dimension of urban heritage tourism. Rather than testing statistical hypotheses, the study seeks to interpret the meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of visitors through immersive case analyses.

Data Collection

The study of Cultural Heritage Buildings (CHBs) and their contribution to urban heritage tourism in Jakarta necessitates a complex and thorough understanding of the interplay between historical architecture, socio-cultural dynamics, and visitor experiences. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this research illuminates how these structures not only reflect the city's heritage but also engage visitors through their lived experiences, perceptions, and interactions with the space.

Field observations, as conducted at six pivotal CHBs—Pos Bloc, Sarinah, Paser Baroe, Gedung Kesenian Jakarta, Monumen Nasional, and Museum Nasional—allow for an immersive analysis of how architectural elements influence visitor perceptions and the multifaceted meanings attached to these heritage sites. Previous studies establish that the emotional and sensory responses of visitors to heritage sites significantly impact their overall experience and satisfaction, particularly in relation to cultural heritage (Tu, 2020; Jocar et al., 2022). These dimensions are further explored in the prospective visitor engagement within Jakarta's CHBs.

In-depth interviews with a diverse group of 20 informants—including local and international visitors, site managers, cultural activists, and creative entrepreneurs—serve to unveil varying perceptions and expectations regarding CHBs. This method resonates with findings from research highlighting the importance of stakeholder narratives in shaping tourism experiences (Duarte et al., 2020; Shyju et al., 2020). The qualitative exploration of heritage tourism's socio-economic implications is also critical (Suyono & Nugraha, 2024). Through structured interviews, the study seeks to capture the pluralistic voice surrounding these sites, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their roles in fostering cultural pride and community engagement.

Additionally, document analysis plays a crucial role in contextualizing the CHBs within broader urban planning and policy frameworks. The investigation of government regulations, institutional archives, promotional brochures, and urban planning documents provides insights into how official narratives and policy decisions have influenced the conservation and promotion of urban heritage (Faouri & Sibley, 2024; Zhao et al., 2023). As urban heritage is often intertwined with economic growth, it is necessary to balance the preservation of CHBs with their potential for enhancing economic viability in the tourism sector (Dayoub et al., 2024; Kern et al., 2021).

Given the increasing commodification of heritage, this study can contribute significantly to ongoing discussions about responsible tourism and sustainable heritage management practices. The synthesis of perspectives gathered from interviews, observations, and documents may yield practical recommendations aimed at minimizing the adverse effects of tourism on local communities while enhancing the experiential authenticity of heritage tourism (Zhang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). Such insights are crucial for urban planners and policymakers seeking to foster sustainable tourism initiatives that respect both cultural heritage and community needs.

Interview Instrument (Sample Questions)

The interview guide was designed using the five experiential dimensions proposed by Schmitt (1999)—sense, feel, think, act, and relate—as well as themes on heritage perception and adaptive reuse. Below are selected sample questions used during the interviews:

Perception of Cultural Heritage:

"In your opinion, are cultural heritage buildings still relevant as tourism destinations today? Why?"

Experiential Dimension (Sense):

"What did you feel through your senses while being at the heritage building (e.g., visuals, sounds, aromas)?"

Experiential Dimension (Feel):

"Did you experience any specific feelings (e.g., pride, nostalgia, awe) during your visit?"

Experiential Dimension (Act):

"Did you feel encouraged to take action after the visit (e.g., post on social media, invite friends, learn more history)?"

Utilization and Innovation:

"Do you think using heritage buildings for cafés, galleries, or cultural events is a good thing? Why?"

Interviews were conducted on-site or via online platforms, depending on the availability of respondents. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic content analysis.

Analytical Strategy

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurrent patterns and experiential themes across the interview data. Codes were categorized under Schmitt's experiential framework and triangulated with field notes and document content to ensure validity and depth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The transformation of historical sites into cultural hubs exemplifies the interplay between architectural preservation and contemporary urban culture. This shift is notably observed at Pos Bloc, an erstwhile Dutch-era post office that has morphed into a vibrant venue for artistic expression. The immersive experiences reported by visitors reflect a blend of architectural nostalgia—manifested through features like stained glass and colonial motifs—and the dynamic nature of contemporary

urban culture. This aligns with research indicating that heritage architecture affects visitor perceptions and enhances the experiential value of cultural engagements (Mensah, 2021; (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2020; (Kastenholz and Gronau 2020; Chan et al. 2024). Such architectural elements invite emotional and cognitive engagement, establishing a context where historical narratives resonate deeply with current cultural discourses.

Similarly, Sarinah, Indonesia's pioneering modern department store, serves as a critical locus for national identity. This site showcases Indonesian craftsmanship and cultural performative arts, stirring strong emotional connections among tourists, related to its significance in the Suharto-era narrative of modernization. Visitors report that elements such as storytelling posters and cultural installations amplify their emotional and cognitive dimensions—echoing findings that demonstrate how narrative-rich environments enhance visitor cognition and emotional responses (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2020; Chan et al., 2024; (Kastenholz and Gronau 2020; Chan et al. 2024). The nuanced emotional experiences cultivated here underscore an essential claim in heritage tourism: cultural heritage is a potent source of community pride and collective identity.

Conversely, Paser Baroe illustrates the complex layering of historical and cultural identities through its physical space characterized by Dutch colonial arcades and Chinese shophouses. Visitors engaging in spontaneous storytelling relate personal anecdotes and reflect upon intergenerational memories tied to shared narratives, a phenomenon documented in cultural heritage studies (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2020; Chan et al., 2024; (Kastenholz and Gronau 2020; Chan et al. 2024). This site serves as a living archive, inviting visitors to explore their identities while reconciling them with the historical context encapsulated within the marketplace's architecture. The interactive and communal storytelling experience relates to community heritage as a collaborative construct where identity is constantly reconstructed through shared experiences and narratives Chan et al., 2024; "Cultural Heritage Conservation in Borno and Yobe States: The Role of Media and Collaborative Initiatives in the Lake Chad Region of Nigeria", 2023)Marković et al., 2021; (Chan et al. 2024; Liang et al. 2024).

Moreover, Gedung Kesenian Jakarta stands as a beacon of living heritage, a space wherein the performing arts bridge past and present. The preservation of historical features—vaulted ceilings and baroque columns—invites audiences to engage in deep historical appreciation through contemporary operas and festivals. The interplay here evokes cognitive and emotional responses as audiences grapple with performance nuances that echo through time, exemplifying the impact that well-preserved architectural settings can have on cultural understanding and engagement Wang & Woramitmaitree, 2024)Xu, 2024) (Wang and Liu 2022; Xu et al. 2024). This cyclical relationship between heritage and performance indicates that preserving physical spaces is crucial for cultivating cultural dialogue and memory.

Monumen Nasional (Monas) enhances visitor engagement through its attempt to provide not just a physical but a symbolic experience. Visitors can ascend to view a panoramic interpretation of national history while navigating interactive dioramas that present Indonesia's past. The incorporation of virtual guides activates both the “act” and “think” dimensions, creating an environment that promotes a participatory learning experience, a concept supported by contemporary cultural heritage scholarship (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2020; Marković et al., 2021; Mcara, 2020) (Kastenholz and Gronau 2020; Moric et al. 2021). This active learning and historical narrative realization illustrate a multidimensional approach to cultural heritage engagement, where the narrative is actively constructed by the visitor's experience.

In a similar vein, the Museum Nasional's recent digital enhancements challenge traditional perceptions of museums as static repositories of artifacts. By integrating technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and QR codes, the museum transforms into an interactive learning ecosystem, facilitating connections between past civilizations and modern identities. The curated storytelling—interweaving Indonesia's rich heritage with global narratives—resonates with contemporary desires for immersive experiences, reinforcing the role of digital tools in enhancing cultural engagement (Dhamo & Canaj, 2024; Shenjere-Nyabezi et al., 2024) (Liang et al. 2024; Xu et al. 2024). This shift marks an essential evolution within museums, showcasing their capacity to adapt in response to visitor expectations and technological advancements.

Emergent Themes from Cultural Heritage Sites

Several emergent themes are evident across these cultural heritage sites, underscoring their shared significance in community engagement and identity formation. Firstly, atmospheric

authenticity profoundly shapes visitor experiences, where the atmospheric qualities of heritage buildings enhance the perception of products and services offered (Mensah, 2021; (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2020; (Menkshi et al. 2021; Kastenholz and Gronau 2020). Preserved architectural elements evoke a sense of place that transcends mere functionality, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in historical narratives.

Secondly, multisensory engagement is critical in how visitors experience cultural heritage. Curated lighting, soundscapes, and scents create an immersive environment that complements historical engagement, enhancing emotional and cognitive connections (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2020; (Liang et al., 2021; (Kastenholz and Gronau 2020; Liang et al. 2021). This aligns with recent findings that emphasize sensory experiences in enhancing understanding of cultural narratives (Mensah, 2021; Wang & Woramitmaitee, 2024) (Menkshi et al. 2021; Wang and Liu 2022).

Narrative integration emerges as a crucial factor, where historical signage, guided tours, and personal stories enhance cognitive and emotional immersion (Liang et al., 2021; Khachatryan, 2024) (Liang et al. 2021; Chan et al. 2024). These narratives foster deeper connections between tourists and cultural sites, transforming passive observation into active participation in historical contexts.

Finally, the theme of community relatability is vital, showcasing cultural heritage sites as arenas where shared narratives cultivate collective identity among visitors. The interactive nature of these sites encourages dialogue and exchange, fostering connections that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries (Dhamo & Canaj, 2024; Chan et al., 2024; "Cultural Heritage Conservation in Borno and Yobe States: The Role of Media and Collaborative Initiatives in the Lake Chad Region of Nigeria", 2023) (Liang et al. 2024; Chan et al. 2024). This communal aspect embodies principles of social cohesion and identity politics, drawing visitors into a participatory mode of heritage consumption that reflects contemporary values.

In conclusion, the transition of cultural heritage sites into vibrant community hubs illustrates the dynamic relationship between architectural preservation and community engagement. Through immersive experiences that promote emotional, cognitive, and social connections, these sites exemplify the transformative potential of cultural heritage in shaping individual and collective identities while fostering community pride and continuity. Future research may further explore implications of interactive technologies and community engagement methodologies to deepen understanding of these dynamics in the context of heritage tourism.

CONCLUSION

Cultural heritage buildings (CHBs) in Jakarta are essential components of the urban environment, interweaving their historical significance with contemporary urban life while promoting heritage tourism. This study emphasizes how successful transformations of CHBs into engaging spaces can contribute to sustainable economic models and enhance tourist experiences. Historical authenticity, combined with innovative design and interactive programming, fosters profound visitor connections to the cultural narratives embedded within these structures (Damanik et al., 2021).

Urban planners and cultural managers are encouraged to reconsider CHBs not merely as static relics but as dynamic resources that can educate and connect diverse generations through their lived experiences. The concept of CHBs as "living archives" aligns with the views of Faouri and Sibley, who assert that heritage can stimulate cultural identity while integrating into urban regeneration strategies (Faouri & Sibley, 2024). Furthermore, integrating local communities into the preservation and co-creation processes of heritage tourism fosters a sense of ownership, which is vital for sustaining these heritage spaces (Aguirre & Alvarado-Sizzo, 2023; Đukanović et al., 2021). Ethnographic studies exploring tourist behaviors and the impacts of participatory approaches are critical for future research, as they can clarify the interactions between visitors and heritage sites, thus contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable urban tourism development (Dameria et al., 2023; Đukanović et al., 2021).

This conclusion highlights the necessity for ongoing dialogues surrounding CHBs' cultural value and their roles in urban tourism, advocating for interdisciplinary approaches that leverage insights from ethnographic studies, economic assessments, and societal impacts to inform effective urban planning strategies (He et al., 2023; Cao, 2023).

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