

Original Article

The Meaning of Place in Historic Building (Case Study: Three Urban Heritage Tourism Destinations at Kesawan Medan)

Sendi Permana^{1*}, Darwin Parlaungan Lubis², Sugiharto³, Sahala Fransiskus Marbun¹, Pidia Amelia⁴

¹ Department of Geography Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia;

² Department of Geographic Information Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia;

³ Department of Graduate Program in Educational Technology, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia;

⁴ Department of History Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia.

*cooresponding e-mail: sendipermana@unimed.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Based on the Regional Spatial Planning of Medan City for the years 2011-2031, several Cultural Heritage Areas have been established that include various historical buildings, one of which is located in the Old City area of Kesawan. The presence of historical buildings such as the Lonsum Building, Tjong A Fie, and Pos Bloc coexists with the rapid business and culinary activities on Ahmad Yani Street and Balai Kota Street. There are indications that a shift in visitation orientation has occurred where the meaning of tourism is stronger compared to a comprehensive exploration of history. The aim of this research is to analyze the meaning of place at three historical buildings and its implications for regional development. This research is qualitative with a geographical approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with 36 informants selected through purposive sampling. The research results show that the meaning of place in the three historical buildings is more dominated functionally, socially, and emotionally than by regional romanticism. The shift in the meaning of historical buildings is a consequence of the massive development of alternative tourism in urban areas. Therefore, it is necessary to reorganize the cultural heritage area involving elements of the community, government, and private sector, with the hope that the authentic value of historical buildings is not entirely eroded by the modernity of urban development.

KEYWORDS

The Meaning of Place; Historical Building; Regional Development

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INTRODUCTION

Place is a space with a unique spatial configuration shaped by culture, social relationships, and psychological processes that are reconstructed through human experience (Tuan, 1975). The terminology of spatial configuration consists of location, physical characteristics, and socio-demographic elements (Sebastien, 2020). Human experience with unique spatial arrangements implicitly represents the process of transforming space into meaning within a place (Manzo, 2005). The meaning of place is a descriptive component of spatial configuration and the attachment to a space that shapes the sense of place (Brehm et al., 2013). Sense of place relates to the attitude towards the spatial configuration created through a set of meanings and attachments to a place held by both individuals and communities (Sebastien, 2020).

Research on concepts referring to beneficial locations in the field of regional development, particularly for space management, promoting places, and recommending development policies (Peng et al., 2020). Specifically, research on the meaning of places with different focuses has been conducted at public land (Eisenhauer et al., 2000), lakeshore properties (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), nature tourism (Farnum et al., 2005), park (Halpenny, 2010), desert towns (Avriel-Avni et al., 2010), classroom (Resor, 2010), residents (Ardoin et al., 2012), traditional market (Ujang, 2014), fishing location (Bermúdez & Lundholm, 2017), architectural work (Martokusumo, 2017), public open space (Liem & Lake, 2018), house (Prasetio et al., 2020), private landowners (Rajala et al., 2020), urban village (Ergler et al., 2020) luxury goods store (Debenedetti, 2021), hotel (Sun et al., 2021), and restaurant (Fauziah et al., 2023). Based on previous research, it is known that the study of the meaning of place in historic buildings post-revitalization has not been extensively conducted. This is in line with Dameria et al (2017) the number of studies related to meaning of place or sense of place in the heritage conservation area of the old city in urban areas is still very limited.

The existence of historical buildings is a potential for the development of cultural heritage tourism, which serves as an alternative tourist attraction in urban areas. Utilizing historical buildings as a tourism product is one alternative to ensure that these historical buildings can continue to survive amidst the massive urban development (Hayati, 2014). In addition, the revitalization of historical buildings as an effort to renew tourist

attractions faces significant challenges, as it not only needs to bring economic benefits to the community but also requires conservation efforts (Tampubolon & Kusuma, 2020). Based on the urgency of the historic buildings, several terminologies are often attributed to historic buildings from a conservation perspective, such as urban heritage, and even local governments categorize a collection of historic buildings into historic areas.

The important historical area serves as the identity of a city, where identity can be interpreted from the meaning of the journey of a city that can be built from historical areas. History is reflected in the shape and character of the buildings in the area, where the shape of these buildings will become the identity of the area. A sense of place needs to be understood by the community to see the success of the design products and the environmental conditions that are full of historical value (Pettricia et al., 2014). The form and historical characteristics present in buildings are an important part of the formation of a sense of place in historic areas. The perception of tourists or the imagery created by the attractions of a historic area can generate a sense of place or feeling towards the area (Lindarto & Eddy, 2016).

Medan is one of the cities that has historical building heritage from both Dutch colonial times and past kingdoms, one of which is located in the Kesawan area. Based on the urgency of its historical value, the Medan city government has categorized the Kesawan area as a cultural heritage area (Regional Spatial Planning of Medan City for the years 2011-2031). The designation of historical buildings classified as cultural heritage is reaffirmed by the Mayor of Medan through a decree No.433/28.K/X/2021 and No.433/29.K/2022 about the establishment of buildings, sites, structures, and cultural heritage areas in the Kesawan area. To avoid further deterioration of the physical, functional, and visual character, the old town area has undergone revitalization. The potential of historical buildings and the renewal or revitalization are expected to become an attraction for tourism activities, entertainment, and business for the community (Sidabutar et al., 2018). The existence of various historical buildings in the Old Town area is juxtaposed with the rapid business and culinary activities on Ahmad Yani Street and Balai Kota Street.

Based on the background description, the purpose of this research is to analyze the meanings of place in historical buildings, which have spatial arrangements with unique characteristics reflected in the place's

attributes and the varying profiles of tourists. The exploration of the meaning of place is an initial step in tracing one's sentiment towards a location, where this sentiment can enhance tourists' satisfaction when visiting historical buildings and can serve as a reference for managers and stakeholders related to historical

buildings to develop spatial arrangements aimed at the target tourists of these historical sites. The study of the meaning of place is beneficial in the field of regional development, particularly in providing recommendations for the management of and historical buildings in the Kesawan area

METHOD

This research was conducted on Ahmad Yani Street and Balai Kota Street with the consideration that these road areas are developed into a Cultural Heritage Area, namely the Kesawan Area, Medan. Based on the researcher's observations on 7 January 2025, three

historical buildings were established as the research locations: (1) Lonsum Building, (2) Tjong A Fie, and (3) Pos Bloc. The justification for selecting these three historical building locations is based on observations that show varying preferences and meanings of the places associated with these historical buildings. The location map of the research can be seen in Figure 1.

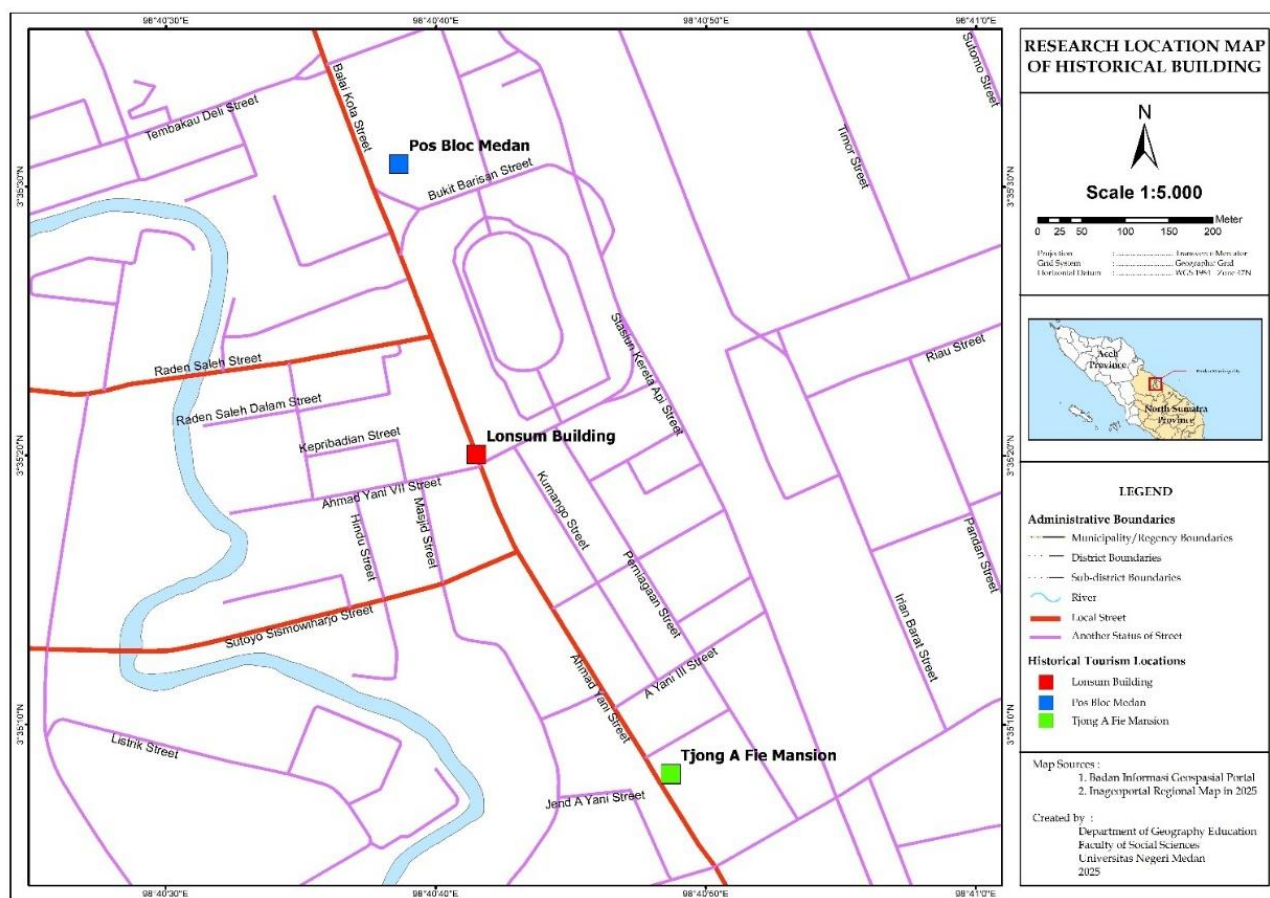


Figure 1. Research Location

The research approach used is qualitative based on a geographical perspective. The unit of analysis used is historical buildings as places. The variables used in this study are the characteristics of historical building places, the meaning of the place to the historical buildings by tourists, and the characteristics of the tourists. The meanings of the place produced by tourists can be categorized into functional, emotional, socio-cultural,

and regional romanticism (Ujang, 2014). The characteristics of the location are examined based on the unique spatial settings of each historical building. Meanwhile, the characteristics of the tourists are analyzed based on socio-demographic factors which include gender, age, employment status, income/pocket money, and place of residence.

The data used in this research consists of primary and secondary data. The primary data consists of field survey results to obtain information regarding the characteristics of historical buildings and their distribution. According to Lemaaniah & Riyayanatasya (2025) mapping tourist attractions allows for the identification of areas with tourism development potential. In addition, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews directly with informants. The technique to obtain informants in this research is purposive sampling. The researcher used purposive sampling by distributing questionnaires to filter informants who are visitors of

historical buildings on Ahmad Yani Street and at City Hall Street. The selected informant criteria in this study are: (1) an age range of 15–64 years (productive age), and (2) having visited one of the historical buildings on Ahmad Yani Street and at City Hall Street, with a minimum of two visits, namely before and after the revitalization of the cultural heritage area. The interview activities were carried out on Sunday in May 2025, with the data collection period occurring in the afternoon, evening, and night. In-depth interviews were conducted with 36 informants, considering and justifying data adequacy at the saturation level in qualitative research.

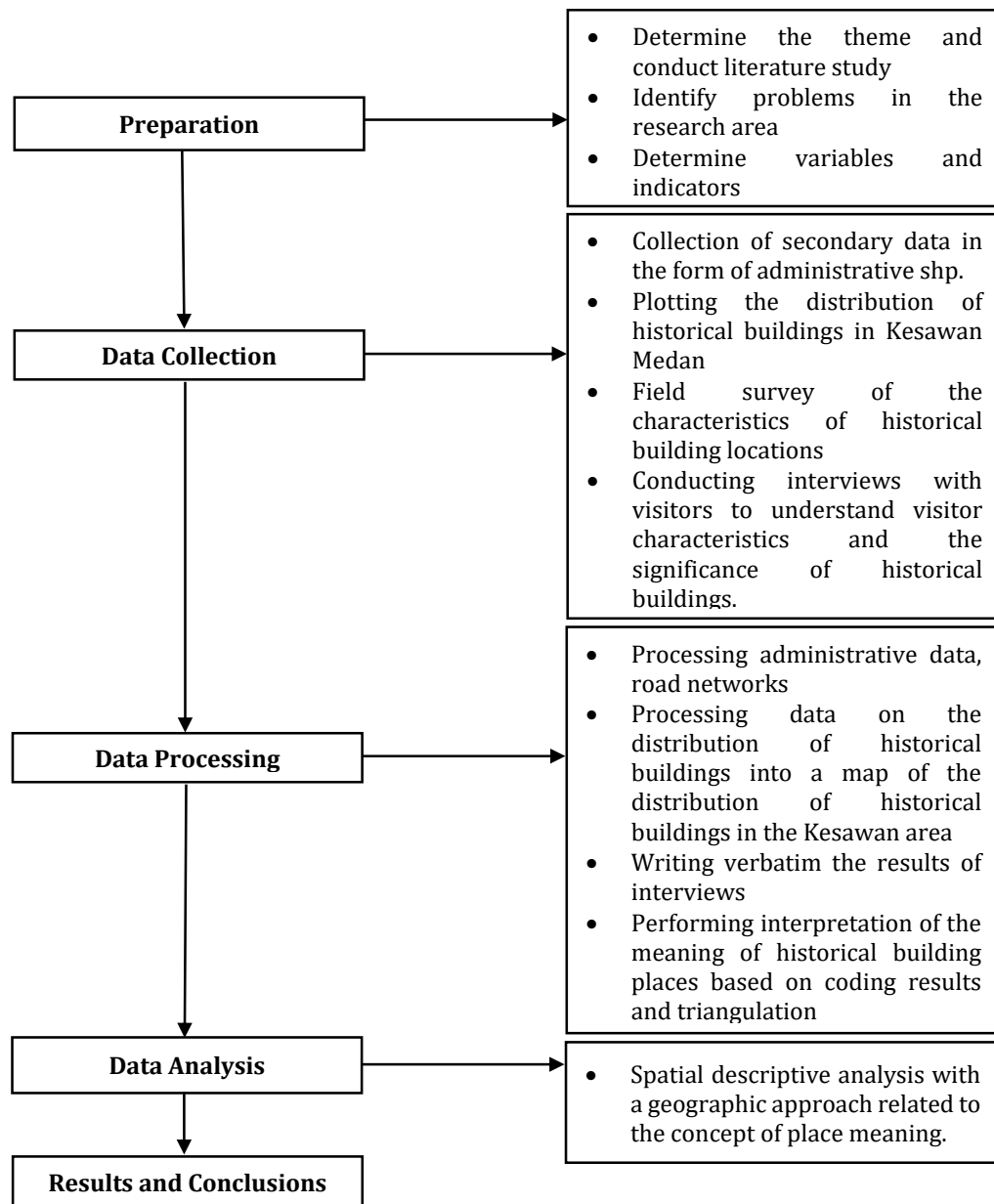


Figure 2. Research Workflow

The results of in-depth interviews are used to identify the characteristics of tourists and analyze the meanings of places based on the characteristics of historic buildings and tourists. The interview results are then processed by compiling verbatim, which involves transcribing the words into text based on audio recordings. The verbatim is then converted and organized into a table to facilitate data identification. Subsequently, the essence of the information is obtained through coding and categorization. The determination of categories for the meanings of historic building places is reduced based on coding that highlights the following keywords: functional meanings (as contemporary tourist spots, photo locations to express self-existence, and work places); emotional meanings (as places to unwind and soothe the mind); socio-cultural meanings (as gathering places with colleagues, making new friends, and chatting) (Fauziah et al., 2023), dan the meaning of regional romanticism (as a place of nostalgia, and awareness of the importance of history) (Yulianto & Estikowati, 2022).

Secondary data consists of shapefile data of administrative areas of Kelurahan Kesawan and the Road Network, specifically Ahmad Yani Street and Medan City Hall Street. These spatial data were downloaded from the inageoportal website and then processed using ArcGIS. The data analysis in this study on the meaning of historical building sites was conducted through descriptive and spatial analysis. GIS is expected to facilitate the analysis of regional aspects of the area's tourism potential (Wachidatullailiya et al., 2025). The results of the analysis provide an overview of the characteristics of the historical building sites and the characteristics of tourists, as well as the interpretation of the historical building sites. To explain the research spatially, the researcher used spatial analysis techniques. Furthermore, to test the validity of the data, a data triangulation method was employed. The workflow of the research can be seen in Figure 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Historical Building Places

The spatial arrangement of the London Sumatra Building (Lonsum) showcases the characteristics of Dutch colonial architecture. This building is located on Ahmad Yani Street, opposite the Merdeka Square. The Lonsum building is constructed with multiple levels and is painted white. The shape of the Lonsum building is influenced by European styles, as seen from the windows and large

columns (Rudiansyah, 2021). The current condition shows that the Lonsum Building is still being used as an office building named PT Perusahaan Perkebunan London Sumatra Indonesia. Spatially, the location of the Lonsum Building is very strategic, situated on a road directly facing Merdeka Square, making it a frequent spot for tourists, mostly teenagers curious about

its existence and heritage. Based on observations, it can be noted that activities conducted around the Lonsum Building include taking photos, especially pre-wedding shots, lounging, shooting videos, and enjoying the city lights.

The spatial arrangement of Pos Bloc shows the pattern of the colonial Dutch post office building that has been revitalized. This grand post office of Medan city has transitioned to Pos Bloc, which is utilized to accommodate Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises through the guidance of the Medan City Government. Additionally, Pos Bloc serves as a creative space for various creative communities and the development of local talent in Medan city (Sasmitasari & Handayani 2022). This project is the result of a collaboration between PT Pos Indonesia and PT Ruang Kreatif Pos to develop Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises that are under the guidance of the Medan City Government so that they can promote their products. Pos Bloc also provides various business forms, both culinary and creative products, that can be accessed by the people of Medan City and its surrounding areas (Hutapea & Siregar, 2023). According to Fadila et al (2025) the attraction of tourist objects can attract the attention of tourists and economically tourism has a positive impact on the people in an area. Based on observations, it can be seen that the activities carried out around Pos Bloc include the Event Bloc Diecast (mini car racing similar to Hot Wheels), doing tasks, taking photos, relaxing, and eating together with friends and family.

The spatial arrangement of Tjong A Fie's building features distinct characteristics that stand out because it differs from other surrounding buildings which are generally in the form of shophouses. Another aspect that makes this building unique is its gate, which is strongly infused with its typical Chinese ambiance, as shown through the roof ornaments and the placement of lion statues in front of the gate, one on the right and one on the left. Meanwhile, the main building shows a mixture of various architectural styles (Christyawaty, 2011). Based on observations, it can be noted that the activities conducted around Tjong A Fie include taking photos,

passing historical sites, and listening to the tour guide's reviews.

Characteristics of Tourists of Historical Buildings

Based on the research that has been conducted, the results of the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists to historical buildings were obtained. Table 1 shows that the tourists are predominantly female informants, with the largest age group being ≤ 20 years old, which is considered the adolescent age group. This age group is mainly experiencing education in High School and higher education institutions. Generally, individuals in this age group spend more time outside the home for educational activities and socializing with peers. According to Almadina & Marcillia (2023) the youth group is in the stage of developing personality skills and maturing interpersonal skills, which can be fulfilled through activities during free time by interacting with friends. In accordance with Isnaniyah et al (2024) the one researching the development of the Old Banten area, namely tourism development directions, is expected to reach teenage tourists, as this phase is a transitional

period filled with curiosity and changing mindsets moving forward. Regarding this research, it was found that the majority of visitors to historical buildings are teenagers with student and college status; therefore, income or pocket money is dominated by less than Rp. 5.000.000.

The visitors of the historical building numbered 26 people spread across various districts in Medan City, and 10 people came from outside of Medan City, including Deli Serdang Regency, Binjai City, Batubara Regency, North Aceh Regency, Palembang City, Jakarta City, and Bogor. This indicates that the historical buildings are visited by tourists from various districts close to the city center of Medan. This is in accordance with the postulate Tobler (1970) That is, all things are interrelated, but something that is close will have more connections than something that is far. This is in line with the findings (Latifah et al., 2020) which studies the Tourism Village of Kementul in Semarang Regency, showing that most of the community visiting the tourist location geographically comes from several sub-districts close to the tourist attraction

Table 1. Characteristics of Tourists of Historical Buildings

No	Gender	Total (Person)	Percentage (%)
1	Female	25	69,44
2	Male	11	30,56
No	Age	Total (Person)	Percentage (%)
1	≤ 20 Years	12	33,33
2	21-25 Years	11	30,56
3	26-30 Years	6	16,67
4	> 30 Years	7	19,44
No	Job status	Total (Person)	Percentage (%)
1	Teacher	5	13,89
2	Lecturer	1	2,78
3	Entrepreneur	2	5,56
4	Student	9	25,00
5	College students	6	16,67
6	Freelencer	1	2,78
7	Pharmacist	1	2,78
8	Marketing	3	8,33
9	Employee	6	16,67
10	Housewife	1	2,78
11	Salesman	1	2,78
No	Salary (Indonesian Rupiah)	Total (Person)	Percentage (%)
1	$< 5.000.000$	28	77,78
2	5.000.000 - 10.000.000	4	11,11
3	10.000.000-15.000.0000	3	8,33
4	$> 15.000.000$	1	2,78

No	Place of origin	Total (Person)	Percentage (%)
1	Medan Sunggal District	3	8,33
2	Medan Johor District	3	8,33
3	Medan Perjuangan District	3	8,33
4	Medan Deli District	2	5,56
5	Medan Helvetia District	2	5,56
6	Medan Tuntungan District	2	5,56
7	Medan Barat District	1	2,78
8	Medan Kota District	2	5,56
9	Medan Maimun District	1	2,78
10	Medan Petisah District	1	2,78
11	Medan Amplas District	2	5,56
12	Medan Tembung District	1	2,78
13	Medan Denai District	1	2,78
14	Medan Belawan District	1	2,78
15	Medan Selayang District	1	2,78
16	Deli Serdang Regency	3	8,33
17	Binjai Municipality	2	5,56
No	Place of origin	Total (Person)	Percentage (%)
18	Batubara Regency	1	2,78
19	Aceh Utara Regency	1	2,78
20	Palembang Municipality	1	2,78
21	Jakarta Municipality	1	2,78
22	Bogor Municipality	1	2,78
Grand total		36	100

Source: Research findings, 2025

The Meaning of Place Based on the Characteristics of Historic Buildings

The meaning of the Lonsum Building as a place consists of functional, emotional, socio-cultural, and regional romantic meanings. The functional meaning is as a photo spot, while the emotional meaning is as a healing place. Furthermore, there is also a socio-cultural meaning as a place to sit with friends and family, and the regional romantic meaning is as a place to explore the history of Medan City. The most dominant meanings are functional for taking photos and emotional for relieving stress. These two meanings are predominantly associated with the age groups of ≤ 20 years and 21-25 years.

"In my opinion, the location is strategic, there are many photo spots and it's beautiful as well, of course my purpose for coming here is to take pictures. Currently, the government is making it easier to access the roads, there are improvements on the bridge, the sidewalks are better and wider, and if you take the train, it only takes 15 minutes to get here" (N, Informant 5th).

The emotional meaning of a place is interpreted by groups of teenagers and young adults in relation to the aesthetic uniqueness of European architecture. Along with the development of social media, teenagers are more aware of the historical buildings that exist, even though it seems that the interest in relaxing with friends is stronger than the interest in thoroughly exploring history. This was stated by E as informant 1st:

"I visited this place because the environment is quite clean, and the buildings are nice, so I was just intrigued. The purpose of coming here is just to walk around and heal. During the Lunar New Year, the decorations are beautiful. The distance from my house to this location is not too far" (E, Informant 1st).

According to Hikmah et al (2022) stating that 'healing' is done in the form of enjoyable activities that bring peace, such as historical tourism. That was also emphasized Kusuma & Fitri (2024) states that historic buildings can serve as places to enjoy leisure time and relieve stress for visitors, due to the beauty that attracts tourists. In

addition, in the context of old towns, the development of urban lifestyles that favor social media can influence individual perception and experience (Dameria et al., 2017; Kurniasari et al., 2024). Some documentation of the historical building Lonsum can be seen as follows.



Figure 3. Lonsum Building at afternoon



Figure 4. Lonsum Building at night

The meaning of Tjong A Fie consists of functional, emotional, socio-cultural, and regional romantic meanings of the place. The functional meaning refers to it as a tourist and photo spot, while the emotional meaning is as a place to enjoy the architecture of the buildings. Additionally, there is also a socio-cultural meaning as a gathering place with friends, and the regional romantic meaning is as a place to explore the history of Tjong A Fie. The most dominant meaning is functional, for tourism and photography.

".....This is the city center, and there are old buildings, so it's nice to see. I also like architecture and photography, so usually, I come here to tour and take photos. What impresses me is capturing moments, so to speak, looking for the aesthetic. Now there are electric buses, making it more flexible to come here, and it's easier now" (K, Informant 16th).

The meaning of place in romantic regionalism is as a location from the past, tracing history and nostalgia of past events. The Tjong A Fie building awakens memories

related to family and the imagination of past events. This was stated by AR as informant 25th:

"I think the building is nice at first, and this is indeed a legacy of Tjong A Fie, which is legendary here. So I also want to know what it was like back in the day, the building is historical. My goal is to see the beautiful architecture, there are many lanterns, and the old buildings are nice, thick, the concrete is good, it somewhat reminisces the past. If the building is nice, even if it's far, I will visit it." (AR, Informant 25th).

Historical buildings play a role in bringing a sense of place because they are considered to have distinctive characteristics that can provide a sense of pride, a connection to the past, and identity for both the community and visitors around the historical buildings (Hawke, 2011). In line with that Sidabutar (2022) those who study historical buildings in the city of Medan state that nostalgia is an important part of human emotions that must always be maintained. Some documentation of the historical building Tjong A Fie can be seen as follows.



Figure 5. Tjong A Fie Building from Outside



Figure 6. Tjong A Fie Building from Inside

The meaning of Pos Bloc consists of the meanings of place in functional, emotional, socio-cultural, and regional romanticism contexts. The functional meaning of the place is as a location for tourism, dining, photography, and completing tasks, while the emotional meaning is as a comfortable and cool place. In addition, there is also a socio-cultural meaning as a gathering place with friends, and the regional romanticism meaning is as a place to explore the history of the city of Medan. The most dominant meaning is functional, for contemporary tourism and self-existence, while the socio-cultural meaning of the place is as a gathering point with friends, where both activities are carried out by visitors in the age group of >20 years.

“the hangout place is nice, especially for Gen Z kids. Another reason to come is to get to know good places, like the nice environment because it's all young people, which is memorable with friends. It used to be less crowded, but now it's more lively, especially on Saturday nights, it's really busy here”. (E, Informant 30th).

Gen Z's preferences in choosing tourist destinations and the need for self-actualization are in line with the statement. Sunjayadi (2019) namely Gen Z's choices tend to shift towards online information, but also interact with the community to gain insights. Generation Z also plays a role in the tourism community, especially with the presence of GenPi (Generasi Pesona Indonesia) in developing digital tourism destination policies as an initiative from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kagungan et al., 2021). In the context of historical tourism, Sunjayadi (2019) emphasizes that the narrative about historical buildings is a substitute for the official historical account with the hope that Gen Z can understand the history behind these buildings.

Another functional meaning that characterizes Pos Bloc is a place to work or do assignments. This is related to the post office space which has been reconstructed to be more modern and trendy, and equipped with a café. The café available is utilized by visitors to gather and even work on tasks.

"I visited this place which is nice for jogging, can be used for other activities and doing assignments. Another reason to come is to be together with friends. Previously, the current condition is much better than it was yesterday, more luxurious, and has more facilities." (R, Informant 28th).

According to Buchori (2022) study on the revitalization of the Old Town, Semarang shows that buildings that have been restored and reconstructed have become places for

hangouts such as cafes, allowing visitors to enjoy the views and the uniqueness of historical buildings with European-style architecture while eating and drinking. In addition, the research Nindhita & Arifin (2024) stated that the phenomenon of drinking coffee and working from cafes has started to be embraced by the younger generation, who tend to spend their time engaging in activities at cafes for both work purposes and social interaction. Some documentation of the historic building Pos Bloc can be seen as follows.



Figure 7. Pos Bloc Building from Outside



Figure 8. Pos Bloc Building from Inside

Based on the findings of the meaning of place, it can be seen that in general, the main entities that create historical buildings differ from one another in relation to the activities that can be carried out in historical buildings with different architectural features and spatial arrangements. According to Manzo (2005). The unique spatial arrangement of a place (historical building in this research) has stimulated the creation of different meanings of the place depending on the experiences or significance within the place through the activities that the place can accommodate. According to Kianicka, et.al (2006) The meaning of a place by tourists is formed due to the characteristics of the place that are perceived when experiencing recreation. This is in line with the statement Davis et al (2010) that for visitors to the heritage area, they can express messages, values, and landscapes that differ from the experiences gained from their own places.

The Meaning of Place Based on Tourist Characteristics

The interpretation of places based on the characteristics of tourist gender in historical buildings shows differences in the meaning of places between female and male genders in each type of historical building. Male tourists interpret historical buildings functionally, that is to say for leisure or vacation, in contrast to female tourists who see it as a place to take photos, eat, or even do assignments. On the other hand, the emotional meaning is interpreted by female tourists

as a place to relax or heal, while male tourists view it as a location to enjoy the architecture of the building. There are also similarities for both female and male genders in the socio-cultural meanings, which include being places to sit and meet up with friends and family, as well as the romantic regional meaning of knowing the history of Medan city.

The meaning of a place based on the age characteristics of tourists visiting historical buildings shows differences in interpretation among age groups. The functional meaning based on the age group ≤ 20 years is seen as a contemporary tourist spot, for taking photos, and for doing assignments, while the functional meaning for the age group 21-25 years is about tourism with friends. The functional meaning for the age group 26-30 years is about dining with family. Not much different, the functional meaning for the age group > 30 years is about traveling or spending holidays with family. The emotional meaning based on the age groups ≤ 20 years, 21-25 years, and 26-30 years is associated with healing, enjoyment, and feeling comfortable in the area of historical buildings. The socio-cultural meaning based on the age group ≤ 20 years is about gathering with friends, while for the ages 21-25 years and > 30 years, it is about family gatherings. The meaning of romantic places based on age groups over 30 years, 21-25 years, and ≤ 20 years is that they serve as places for nostalgia related to the architecture of historical buildings.

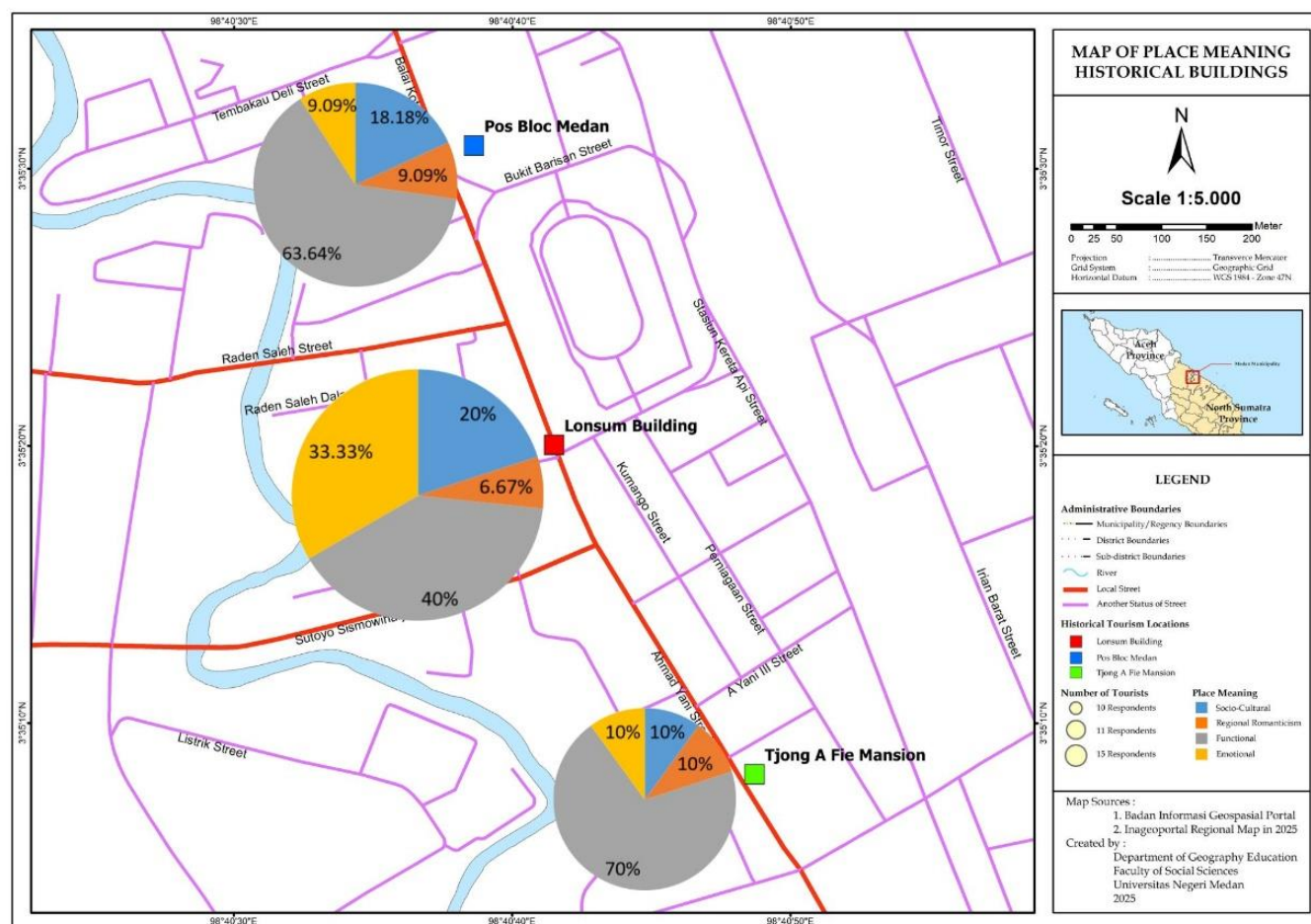


Figure 9. Map of Place Meaning Historical Building (Research findings, 2025)

The meaning of a place based on the employment status characteristics of tourists at historical buildings can be differentiated between visitors who are employed and those who are not. Employed visitors consist of private employees, marketers, teachers, entrepreneurs, lecturers, pharmacists, freelancers, and salespeople. Employed visitors interpret historical buildings functionally, socio-culturally, emotionally, and as a romanticized regional place. However, it is predominantly a functional interpretation, where it serves as a place for tourism, dining, and taking photos with family, as this relates to employed visitors wanting to spend time together during their free time or holidays. Meanwhile, unemployed visitors consist of high school students, college students, and housewives. Overall, the visitors to historical buildings are predominantly students and college students, whose interpretations are formed functionally, emotionally, with a sense of regional romance, and socio-culturally. The behavior of society, particularly among teenagers, in the

form of gathering with friends is a part of the urban youth lifestyle as a form of expression and self-existence.

The meaning of places based on the characteristics of the income/pocket money of tourists visiting historical buildings in the group of <5.000.000 is functionally as a place to take photos, sightseeing, and doing assignments. Socio-culturally, it serves as a place to sit and gather with friends and family. Emotionally, it is a place to unwind, with a romantic notion of regional identity through understanding the history of Medan city. In this group, tourists visiting historical buildings consist of high school students and university students, with a destination predominantly at Lonsum Building. In contrast, tourists in the income/pocket money group of 5.000.000–10.000.000 have only two meanings: functional meaning, which is sightseeing, and socio-cultural meaning, which is gathering with friends, with destinations dominated by Lonsum Building and Pos Bloc. Meanwhile, the meaning of place based on an income/allowance of 10.000.000–15.000.000 has two

meanings: functional, which is tourism, and emotional, which is enjoying the beauty of architectural structures with the destination dominated by Tjong A Fie. In contrast, the meaning for the group with an income over 15.000.000 is only functional, which is tourism with the destination being Tjong A Fie.

The meaning of a place based on the characteristics of the residences of tourists in historical buildings is categorized into tourists residing in various sub-districts within the city of Medan with functional, socio-cultural, emotional meanings, and regional romanticism. Visitors are more inclined to visit historical buildings that are close to their place of residence, especially for visitors aged ≤ 20 years and 21-25 years. Meanwhile, visitors residing outside the city of Medan perceive the place predominantly in a functional manner as a tourist destination and a spot for photos, as well as an emotional meaning as a place to seek a new atmosphere and enjoy the architecture of the buildings.

Based on the description above, it can be understood that demographic factors are determinants of visitor responses to spatial arrangements, including geographical location, experiences in historically characterized physical spaces, as well as tourist characteristics shaped by aesthetics and experiences from recreational activities. The research results align with the findings Faruq & Tucuan (2021) which studies the Heritage Area of the Chinatown of Bandung, stating that demographic, psychographic, and geographic factors can illustrate the meaning of space in that heritage area.

The Meaning of Historical Building Sites and Its Implications for Regional Development

Based on the previous description, it can be understood that among the three historical buildings, they are more dominantly interpreted functionally as contemporary tourist attractions, places for photography to express self-existence, and places to do assignments. The functional meaning of these places aligns with the high interest in visiting historical buildings among teenagers and young adults, which is also in line with the revitalization of historical building areas that has made the historical buildings appear aesthetic and contemporary. As part of cultural preservation, the old city has also been aesthetically revamped, making it more appealing to the millennial generation who loves to share photos on social media. (Nugraha et al., 2021).

Along with the development of social media, teenagers are more aware of historical buildings through

social media; on the other hand, findings indicate that functional, social, and emotional meanings are more dominant compared to regional romanticism or a comprehensive exploration of history. According to Zarezadeh et al., (2019); Prabhaswara, (2024) This phenomenon is in line with the characteristics of modern tourists, especially the millennial generation, who are more inclined to share visual experiences through social media rather than delving into the historical aspects of the location. According to Rahardjo (2013) knowledge of the historical area is important because historical areas have diverse characteristics and different preservation methods in each region.

The character form and history present in buildings become an important part of the meaning of places as a result of the activities that can be accommodated in those locations. The change in the function of historical building spaces due to modernization results in a change in activity patterns from the past to the present. According to Tampubolon & Kusuma (2020) The character of historical areas is displaced by modernization, leading to the loss of the character of buildings and history in the area, which in turn impacts the identity crisis, in line with that statement Ulva et al (2022) emphasizes that modernization is slowly shifting the authenticity of cultural heritage owned by a city along with the passage of time and the development of that city

The dynamics of managing historical buildings and the emerging issues also affect the Kesawan area related to the law that is not properly enforced, competing with the advancement of development, and the society that prioritizes economic elements over history (Tampubolon et.al, 2020). In a broader aspect, namely spatial planning, it can be related to the findings Hayati (2014) Those who researched the utilization of the historical building Fort Rotterdam in Makassar revealed that several developments around

Fort Rotterdam are difficult to control in accordance with the zoning and spatial planning that has been established, thus requiring a reorganization of the cultural conservation area, which is expected to remain synergistic with the growth of the surrounding environment.

Tourism development involves various interconnected elements to create a sustainable destination (Nur Alif & Saputra, 2025). In addition to being leadership and well-organized also needs to collaborate with the tourism industry (Bramantio & Cahyaningsih,

2025), furthermore there are three driving elements of development in a city, namely the community that occupies the area for a certain period, the government as the authority holder to determine the type of land use, and the private sector that plays a role in development (Tampubolon & Kusuma, 2020). Therefore, protection of cultural heritage areas requires a holistic approach so that the revitalization and conservation processes can proceed synergistically with urban development without overlooking the historical elements as a whole

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of historical building sites can accommodate different activities in each historical building. The Lonsum building has a spacious and aesthetic landscape and reflects the atmosphere of European architecture. Tjong A Fie has decorations that are still natural and have Chinese patterns, showcasing a typical atmosphere of the past, while Pos Bloc offers a creative space for the youth, providing various forms of businesses in both culinary and creative products, and displays a trendy or modern atmosphere.

Based on the spatial arrangements of different place characteristics, distinct meanings of place are created for each historical building. Overall, the historical buildings on Ahmad Yani Street and Balai Kota Street have four meanings of place, predominantly functional meanings, followed by socio-cultural, emotional, and regional romanticism meanings. Here is a summary of the meanings of place for the three historical buildings: at Lonsum Building, the functional meaning of place is for photo opportunities, while the emotional meaning is as a healing place. At Tjong A Fie building, the functional meaning is a tourist destination, whereas the regional romanticism meaning is a place of nostalgia and historical awareness. For the Pos Bloc building, the functional meaning of place includes being a contemporary tourist spot, self-existence, and doing assignments, while the socio-cultural meaning involves gathering with friends.

Based on the previous description, it can be understood that among the three historic buildings,

they are more dominantly interpreted in functional, socio-cultural, and emotional terms rather than through regional romanticism or a comprehensive historical exploration. The change in the function of the spaces in historic buildings due to modernization has resulted in a transformation of past and present activity

patterns. Based on the conclusion of this study, it can be articulated that there are limitations in the reconstruction of the meaning of historic buildings, viewed only from the perspective of tourists. Therefore, the recommendation that can be proposed for future research is that the meaning of places should be examined from the perspectives of local communities, tourists, and the government to obtain a complete or holistic description.

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