REVITALIZATION OF SURABAYA'S OLD PRECINCT: CHALLENGE AND STRATEGY OF GROWTH

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Abstract- The revitalization of Surabaya's old precinct holds strong potential to enhance the city's tourism appeal and stimulate local economic development. This heritage-rich area has historical and cultural value, making it a strategic destination for both domestic and international tourists. However, several challenges hinder its development, including a lack of interactive attractions, insufficient public facilities such as cafés, rest areas, and toilets, as well as limited visitor engagement and short tourist stays. This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, using triangulated data from in-depth interviews with government officials, heritage community members, and tourism practitioners, along with field observations and document analysis. The research aims to identify key strategies, opportunities, and constraints in revitalizing the precinct. Findings highlight the critical role of multi-stakeholder collaboration in revitalization efforts, where the synergy between the government, local communities, and the private sector is essential to success. The study also shows that improved infrastructure, enhanced public awareness, and creative tourism programming are necessary to sustain heritage tourism in the area. This study contributes to the discourse on sustainable urban heritage management and offers practical recommendations to policymakers seeking to balance conservation with tourism-driven economic growth in historic urban districts.

Keywords: Heritage Tourism; Revitalization; Old Precinct; Economic Growth; Surabaya

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1 Research Background
The main focus of urban tourist growth in many nations is now the revival of old regions. In Indonesia, cities such as Semarang and Jakarta have implemented large-scale revitalization programs in their old precincts, such as Kota Lama Semarang and Kota Tua Jakarta. These efforts, backed by both government and public-private partnerships, have demonstrated varying degrees of success. For instance, revitalization in Kota Lama Semarang has increased

tourism arrivals by 18% annually between 2018 and 2022 (Dewi et al., 2020), while Jakarta's old town saw a resurgence of micro-businesses and increased pedestrian accessibility (Prabowo & Salaj, 2020). Despite these outcomes, challenges related to sustainability, local engagement, and spatial justice continue to emerge (Handaruni et al., 2021).

Surabaya's Old Precinct, also known as Kota Lama Surabaya, is an area rich in architectural heritage and colonial-era urban form. However, it has suffered from decades of neglect and functional decline. Unlike Jakarta and Semarang, academic attention to Surabaya's revitalization remains limited. Previous studies mostly focus on physical infrastructure or administrative planning, without exploring the broader socio-economic and ecological dimensions of the revitalization process or the stakeholder dynamics involved (Sihite & Pakpahan, 2023; Trifena & Dewi, 2021).

Numerous international studies show that well-managed revitalization can lead to substantial financial and social benefits, including increased tourism revenue, business growth, and improved community cohesion (Jelinčić & Mansfeld, 2019; Vázquez-Torres et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). Conversely, poorly planned revitalization may trigger gentrification, marginalization of local communities, and the erosion of intangible cultural values (Lak et al., 2020; Outón, 2020). Despite such concerns, research on these trade-offs in the Indonesian context, particularly in Surabaya, is still sparse.

However, there remains a lack of integrative studies that evaluate the revitalization process of heritage areas through a multi-stakeholder lens, particularly in the context of Surabaya's Old Precinct. There is also insufficient attention to how inclusivity, sustainability, and local community involvement intersect in shaping tourism-based regeneration. Therefore, this study seeks to address that gap by assessing the effectiveness and inclusivity of Surabaya's Old Precinct revitalization strategy, with attention to socio-cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions.

This study intends to give a whole picture of Surabaya's Old Precinct's renovation project in order to boost tourism visits. More precisely, this study will look at several important elements of the revival, namely: Identification of the tactics used in Surabaya's Old Precinct as well as the supportive and discouraging elements. This study also explores the potential outcomes of the revitalization program, including increased tourist visits and local economic development, while critically assessing the challenges in maintaining a balance between modernization and cultural preservation. Furthermore, it examines the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the revitalization of Surabaya's Old Precinct to provide a comprehensive understanding of its broader implications.

This study is important since it helps us to realize how the rejuvenation of Surabaya's Old Precinct may inspire the creation of cultural-based tourism in other Indonesian Precincts. Poorly handled revitalization can result in the loss of cultural identity and local community involvement, as several studies have demonstrated (Lak et al., 2020). Accordingly, this study aims to evaluate the extent to which inclusive and sustainable principles have been applied in the revitalization process and to identify practical strategies that can strengthen long-term heritage tourism development. Furthermore, this study can be a guide for the government and interested parties in developing more sensible rules for the administration of historical tourist destinations. With this study, it is envisaged that ideal techniques may be discovered to increase heritage tourism in Surabaya without compromising current historical values (Jagrati et al., 2020).

1.2 Research Objective

This study aims to critically examine the revitalization of Surabaya's Old Precinct, a heritage area undergoing physical and functional transformation through government-led interventions. Once neglected due to rapid modernization and urban sprawl, the area is now positioned as a potential hub for heritage tourism and cultural-based economic activities. While some progress has been made, particularly in infrastructure improvements and increasing visitor flows, significant challenges persist. These include limited community involvement, the risk of gentrification, weak institutional coordination, and questions surrounding the long-term sustainability of revitalization outcomes. To address these issues, this research focuses on identifying the strategies applied in the revitalization process, assessing the perceived impacts on local communities and urban tourism, and evaluating the inclusivity and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder collaboration. The study tries to explore how government institutions, heritage communities, and tourism practitioners interact within the revitalization framework. Ultimately, this study intends to generate practical insights for policymakers and contribute to theoretical discussions on sustainable urban heritage management, particularly in the Indonesian context where academic attention to multi-actor revitalization remains limited.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1. Concept of Revitalization

Revitalization has been widely studied through various perspectives. Previous research generally classifies revitalization into physical, social, economic, and cultural dimensions (Handaruni et al., 2021; Prabowo & Salaj, 2020). Physical revitalization often emphasizes infrastructure and restoration of buildings, while socio-economic revitalization tends to focus on improving livelihoods and increasing community participation (Outón, 2020). Wu et al. (2022), using a case-comparative method in East Asia, argue that successful revitalization requires multi-stakeholder governance and alignment with tourism-based development goals. Meanwhile, Lak et al. (2020) caution that such projects may lead to gentrification and exclude local communities.

These studies indicate a tension between modernization and cultural conservation. While many promote revitalization as a catalyst for growth, others highlight risks such as commodification and loss of authenticity. However, most of these works use either case study or qualitative approaches centered in non-Indonesian contexts, with limited exploration of stakeholder dynamics in Indonesian heritage areas.

1.3.2. Studies on Old Precincts

In Indonesia, prior studies have focused on Semarang and Jakarta (Dewi et al., 2020; Handaruni et al., 2021), highlighting policy implementation and spatial transformation. Trifena & Dewi (2021) employed observational and interview-based methods to assess socio-economic shifts post-revitalization in Semarang, while Aminuddin et al. (2023) examined youth behavior after physical renewal of Semarang's old town. However, these studies do not fully explore the interplay between government, community, and private sector in sustaining revitalization. Hence, this study fills a gap by using a qualitative descriptive approach focusing on multi-stakeholder perspectives in Surabaya's Old Precinct, aiming to uncover not only outcomes but also governance processes and community roles in heritage revitalization.

1.3.3. Surabaya in the Context of Revitalization

Surabaya has received relatively limited scholarly attention in terms of heritage revitalization compared to other Indonesian cities. Existing studies primarily examine

government programs or physical restoration efforts. For instance, Sihite & Pakpahan (2023) explored market revitalization in Surabaya using a mixed-method approach focusing on economic indicators, while Aminuddin et al. (2023) focused on post-revitalization social behavior among urban youth in Semarang, drawing indirect parallels to Surabaya.

More locally grounded studies, such as those by Trifena & Dewi (2021), emphasize the socio-spatial dynamics in Semarang's heritage areas, yet similar frameworks have not been widely applied to Surabaya. The dominant focus in Surabaya-based studies remains on infrastructure development and regulatory implementation, with less attention paid to the integration of community perspectives and the multi-dimensional impact of revitalization.

There is also a lack of comparative or longitudinal studies analyzing how different stakeholder groups, such as local authorities, community organizations, and tourism actors, perceive and contribute to the revitalization process. Furthermore, no research has thoroughly investigated how these revitalization efforts influence both cultural sustainability and economic resilience in Surabaya's Old Precinct. Thus, this study offers a novel contribution by using a triangulated qualitative approach to explore multi-actor dynamics and sustainable strategies in Surabaya's heritage regeneration efforts.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
2.1 Data Sources
This study applies a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the revitalization process of Surabaya's Old Precinct. The data consists of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three key informants representing different stakeholder groups. These included: (1) the Head of the Surabaya City Tourism Office, representing local government; (2) a representative from Surabaya Heritage Community, reflecting cultural preservation perspectives; and (3) a local heritage tourism activist, representing practitioners in the field.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face over the course of three separate sessions, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes, and were guided by open-ended questions to explore experiences, perspectives, and challenges in the revitalization process. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis. Secondary data were gathered through a literature review of more than 20 sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and academic books relevant to revitalization, heritage tourism, and historic urban precincts, including the work of (Muryani, 2019).

2.2 Data Collection
This research employed three primary qualitative data collection methods: in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. These methods were selected to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the revitalization process and ensure research credibility through triangulation, as recommended in recent qualitative research methodologies (Nowell et al., 2017).

First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three key informants representing the main stakeholder groups involved in the revitalization of Surabaya's Old Precinct: (1) the Head of the Surabaya City Tourism Office (government), (2) a representative from the Surabaya Heritage Community (civil society), and (3) a heritage tourism practitioner (private actor). Interviews were conducted between June and August 2023, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes, and guided by open-ended questions. All sessions were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed for analysis (Ivey, 2023). Second, non-participant observations were carried out in key areas of the Old Precinct, such as Jalan Gula, Jalan Karet, House of

Sampoerna, and Jembatan Merah, focusing on infrastructure quality, visitor experience, and the interaction between tourists and local residents. Observations were conducted on both weekdays and weekends to capture variations in tourist activity (Oladeji, 2022). Third, document analysis included the review of official revitalization reports, government planning documents, and academic publications related to heritage tourism and urban regeneration. These materials were sourced from municipal archives, the Ministry of Tourism, and scholarly databases. This method enriched the contextual understanding of policy implementation and stakeholder narratives (Balane et al., 2020).

To ensure data validity, this study applied methodological triangulation, comparing findings across the three data sources. For example, claims about improved public amenities were validated through on-site verification and cross-checked with relevant planning documents. This approach strengthens the trustworthiness and confirmability of the research (Megheirkouni & Moir, 2023).

2.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data in this study followed the interactive model developed by Mezmir (2020), which emphasizes a cyclical and iterative approach to meaning-making. The process began with data condensation, where interview transcripts, observation notes, and supporting documents were carefully reviewed to identify relevant information in line with the research objectives. Redundant and irrelevant data were excluded, while essential statements were highlighted and categorized into preliminary codes. This step allowed the researcher to simplify large volumes of qualitative data while preserving their contextual richness.

Following condensation, the data were organized and displayed using thematic matrices and tables in Microsoft Excel to reveal emerging patterns and relationships between stakeholders, challenges, and revitalization outcomes. This visual representation of data facilitated a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics involved in the revitalization of Surabaya's Old Precinct, especially concerning how different actors perceive and influence the process.

The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying them through repeated comparison across data sources. Triangulation was used to enhance the credibility of findings by cross-checking information derived from interviews, field observations, and official documents. Although no computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was used, the manual coding process, conducted systematically using Excel, ensured transparency, rigor, and traceability in the analytical process.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION
3.1 Rejuvenation of Surabaya's Old Precinct

The Surabaya City Government is working to revive Surabaya's Old Precinct in order to protect historical legacy and simultaneously improve tourism appeal. Based on the findings of the observation, revitalization is implemented via several primary stages: identification and mapping of the region, restoration of historical structures, construction of supporting infrastructure, and cooperation with the community and the business sector. The government works to match modern needs with the preservation of the local historical treasures. But problems in the execution of this revival effort now include limited public awareness, financial restrictions, and overlapping rules.

> *"We want the Old Precinct not only to be a symbol of history but also a center for sustainable cultural activities and creative economy," the Surabaya City Government Tourism Office chief said.*

3.2 Justification of Information on Old Precinct Revitalization

The results of the interview reveal that the two primary directions of the revitalization of the Old Precinct are the establishment of public amenities supporting heritage tourism and the actual restoration of historical buildings.   While the infrastructure developed includes pedestrian paths, tourist information centers, and public areas that may be used by both the community and visitors, the restoration is executed with the historic character of the buildings.

> *"We continue to advocate that every development policy takes into account the aspect of historical preservation," the Surabaya Heritage management said. A progressive city is one that does not forget its roots.*

The revival of the Old Precinct directly affects visitor numbers, therefore influencing both domestic and foreign travel. Nonetheless, observations show that some factors still potentially impede the sustainability of this location as a top tourist destination, including the absence of public facilities and the low public awareness in preserving cleanliness.

3.3 Heritage Tourism in the Old Precinct

Old City Surabaya's heritage tourism has great potential to develop into a fresh commercial attraction.   Observations suggest that the expansion of historical tourism can propel the creative economy—where MSME players such artists, chefs, and craftspeople can actively participate in the heritage tourist ecosystem.   Still, there are flaws in the features of tourism attractions and promotion that can improve the attractiveness of the region.

> *"Heritage tourism can become one of Surabaya's main attractions, especially with the increasing public interest in destinations that have historical and cultural value," Surabaya's activists in heritage tourism said.*

According to interview data, the Old Precinct of Surabaya still requires creative presentation for heritage tourism.   The idea presented has to be more than just a trip to historic sites; it also includes more participatory activities including theater performances, thematic walking tours, and storytelling.

> *"We try to package historical tourism in a more interesting way, such as storytelling, thematic walking tours, and theatrical performances in the Old Precinct area," the Surabaya Heritage Tourism Activists clarified further.*

3.4 Challenges in Revitalization

One of the most pressing challenges identified in the revitalization of Surabaya's Old Precinct is the lack of comprehensive tourism infrastructure that supports long-stay visitation. Field observations revealed that tourists often visit only to take photos in front of historic buildings and leave shortly after, due to the absence of supporting amenities such as rest areas, interactive attractions, and food stalls. As one informant noted,

> *"Many tourists come just to take photos in front of the historical building without any other activities that would make them stay longer."*

This indicates that revitalization efforts have so far prioritized physical restoration over experiential enhancement. In contrast to successful cases in Semarang or Penang, where interactive heritage tours, culinary hubs, and storytelling initiatives extend visitor engagement, Surabaya's Old Precinct remains underutilized in terms of cultural programming. The absence

of clean and accessible public toilets, minimal signage, and poor waste management further erode the overall tourist experience.

Although the government has initiated structural repairs, these efforts have not been matched with strategies to activate the space through community-based tourism or creative programming. This reflects a common gap in heritage-led regeneration, where urban aesthetics are improved without accompanying functional transformation (Outón, 2020; Wu et al., 2022).

To address these issues, we argue that revitalization must move beyond a conservation-driven model toward a visitor-centered and community-empowered approach. This includes activating unused spaces for performances, integrating digital interpretation tools, and involving local MSMEs to develop site-specific services. Without such a shift, revitalization will risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

3.5 Advantages of Revitalization

The revitalization of Surabaya's Old Precinct has generated several tangible and intangible benefits, both for the city and its residents. One of the most notable impacts is the emergence of a creative economy ecosystem, where local artisans, culinary entrepreneurs, and cultural performers begin to find a platform for their work. As noted by a heritage activist,

> *"Revitalization is not only the government's responsibility but also the community's. We actively inform locals about the need of conserving cultural legacy."*

This quote reflects a growing awareness and participation among local communities in reclaiming their cultural identity through tourism. The presence of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in restored areas offers new economic opportunities while simultaneously enhancing the authenticity of the visitor experience. Similar findings were reported by Jelinčić & Mansfeld (2019), who emphasized the role of local entrepreneurship as a pillar of sustainable heritage tourism.

However, while these benefits are visible, they are not yet systematized. Our field observations and interviews reveal that support for local businesses remains informal and sporadic. The absence of structured programs, such as incubation hubs, promotional campaigns, or tax incentives, limits the scalability of these community-driven initiatives. Moreover, although physical revitalization has improved building facades and pedestrian access, it has not yet fully translated into a vibrant, functional tourism space. This gap echoes the findings of Khorasgani & Eskandar (2024), who argue that revitalization without integrated economic planning risks superficial transformation.

Furthermore, the revitalization process has symbolic value in repositioning Surabaya as a city that respects its historical roots while embracing innovation. Cultural events held in the Old Precinct, such as heritage festivals or art installations, contribute to urban branding and place-making (Vázquez-Torres et al., 2022). Nonetheless, our data suggest that such initiatives are still occasional rather than embedded in long-term cultural policy. Without a coherent cultural calendar or dedicated governance body for heritage precinct management, the impact of these advantages may remain limited.

In addition, the revival of urban identity fosters collective memory and civic pride. Local residents reported a renewed sense of connection to their surroundings, particularly among youth who were previously disengaged. This finding aligns with Lak et al. (2020), who note that participatory revitalization models enhance social cohesion and spatial belonging. However, Surabaya's model still lacks mechanisms for sustained intergenerational engagement, such as youth-led storytelling projects or volunteer docent programs, which have

proven effective in cities like Yogyakarta and Seoul (Roosinda & Rachman, 2021; Wu et al., 2022).

We suggest that the advantages of revitalization can be deepened through structured policy support that targets capacity building, business incubation, and cultural programming. Government and private stakeholders should co-develop community partnership models to ensure equitable benefit-sharing, while academia can contribute through participatory research and monitoring frameworks. Only through such cross-sector collaboration can revitalization evolve from a physical beautification project into a transformative engine for cultural and economic renewal.

3.6 Strategy of Growth

Although the revitalization of Surabaya's Old Precinct has generated some initial momentum in cultural tourism development, its long-term success depends on the implementation of integrated and forward-looking growth strategies. One of the most pressing needs is the improvement of basic public infrastructure. Observations indicate a severe lack of accessible, clean public toilets, trash bins, seating areas, and informative signage throughout the heritage zone. As one informant from the Tourism Office emphasized,

> *"We must be careful in adapting old buildings to modern needs without damaging their historical value."*

This statement highlights a key dilemma—upgrading facilities while maintaining heritage authenticity. Such infrastructural challenges are not unique to Surabaya. Studies in other urban heritage contexts (e.g., Penang and Malacca) have shown that visitor comfort and convenience are critical to increasing tourist dwell time and spending (Puspitasari et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2022). However, Surabaya's revitalization strategy remains largely physical and architectural in nature, lacking robust planning for experiential and service-based enhancements. This is a missed opportunity, as tourism growth depends not only on restored structures but also on the depth of visitor engagement.

Beyond infrastructure, the strategic development of creative and immersive attractions is essential. Interviews with heritage tourism practitioners reveal a demand for programming that includes storytelling, guided walking tours, interactive exhibitions, and cultural performances, elements that are currently underdeveloped.

> *"We try to package historical tourism in a more interesting way, such as storytelling, thematic walking tours, and theatrical performances," said a heritage tourism activist.*

These forms of engagement are supported in literature as catalysts for cultural learning and memory-making, which drive repeat visitation (Jelinčić & Mansfeld, 2019; Vázquez-Torres et al., 2022).

Importantly, growth must be inclusive. Our findings show limited participation from residents in tourism planning and management. The community's role is largely passive, with little capacity-building support or economic empowerment. This mirrors concerns raised in other studies, where top-down revitalization efforts risk excluding the very communities they intend to benefit (Lak et al., 2020; Outón, 2020). Strategic growth, therefore, should involve participatory planning forums, community tourism cooperatives, and training programs that equip locals to act as guides, hosts, or vendors within the precinct.

Additionally, digital transformation offers another pathway for growth. Smart tourism tools such as mobile applications, augmented reality heritage tours, and digital storytelling platforms can enhance visitor interaction while preserving physical assets. Cities like Seoul and Singapore have successfully implemented such innovations, balancing authenticity with

interactivity (Khorasgani & Eskandar, 2024)Surabaya has yet to explore these possibilities, despite growing smartphone penetration and digital tourism trends in Indonesia.

Based on the evidence gathered, we propose a growth strategy that consists of three interrelated components: infrastructure enhancement focused on accessibility and cleanliness; cultural programming and creative content development to enrich the visitor experience; and community inclusion and digital integration to build a resilient, future-oriented heritage tourism system. These strategic pillars, if developed collaboratively across stakeholders, can transform Surabaya's Old Precinct from a restored site into a living, dynamic cultural destination.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the revitalization of Surabaya's Old Precinct is not merely a physical restoration effort but a multidimensional process that intersects with issues of cultural sustainability, community participation, and economic regeneration. While the initiative has succeeded in improving the visual appeal and symbolic value of the heritage zone, critical challenges remain, including limited infrastructure, weak public engagement, and the absence of immersive tourism programs.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the discourse on urban heritage revitalization by emphasizing the importance of a multi-actor perspective. Unlike many previous studies that focus predominantly on architectural preservation or economic outcomes, this study highlights the interplay between government policies, community involvement, and private sector innovation. It expands the framework of heritage urbanism by integrating socio-cultural dynamics and visitor experience as essential components of sustainable regeneration.

From a managerial perspective, this study offers several practical implications for urban planners, heritage managers, and tourism stakeholders. First, revitalization efforts must be accompanied by clear institutional frameworks that support cross-sector collaboration. Local governments should establish dedicated heritage management units that involve representatives from the community and private sector to ensure that decisions are inclusive and adaptive. Second, strategic investments in public infrastructure, such as signage, sanitation, and digital interpretation, should be prioritized to enhance visitor experience and encourage longer stays. Third, programs to empower local communities and MSMEs through training, incubation, and market access are essential to prevent the exclusionary effects of gentrification and to ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are equitably distributed. Lastly, city branding strategies should integrate heritage values into long-term cultural planning, supported by regular events, partnerships with creative industries, and digital storytelling initiatives. These managerial steps will help ensure that revitalization is not only visually successful but also economically viable and socially inclusive.

The novelty of this study lies in its use of triangulated qualitative data to assess revitalization from the ground up, incorporating voices from policy, practice, and community. It addresses a research gap in the Indonesian context by providing a focused case study of Surabaya's Old Precinct, which has been relatively underexplored in comparison to cities like Semarang or Jakarta. Furthermore, the study advances methodological innovation by combining observational evidence with stakeholder narratives, resulting in a holistic understanding of revitalization impact.

Overall, this research underscores that revitalization is most effective when it transforms not only spaces but also the people and practices that animate them. Future efforts should prioritize inclusivity, long-term programming, and adaptive governance to ensure that heritage sites remain vibrant, relevant, and resilient in the face of urban change.

4.1 Limitations and Guideline for Next Research

Although this study effectively investigated several crucial elements of the regeneration of Surabaya's Old Precinct, there are several constraints that might provide chances for next studies. First, while a more thorough examination of visitors' impressions and the effects of revitalization on their travel experiences is still lacking, this study concentrates more on the viewpoints of the government and the historical community. Therefore, next studies should investigate how visitors perceive visiting the renovated heritage area and the elements influencing their satisfaction. Second, this study has not particularly quantified the financial influence of revitalization on SME players and the creative economy sector in the Old Precinct of Surabaya; so, next studies should explore an economic effect analysis grounded on quantitative data. Future studies should thus not only improve the management techniques for historical-based tourism regions but also offer more general understanding of the social, cultural, and financial effects of heritage area restoration.

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