

(Research/Review) Article

Study of The Potential Development of Leading Tourist Areas in Binjai City

Muhammad Fachri Bin Zahari ¹, Cut Nuraini ^{2*}, and Abdi Sugiarto ³

¹ Student, Magister of Regional and Urban Planning, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia ; e-mail : m.fachrizahari@gmail.com

² Lecturer, Magister of Regional and Urban Planning and Department of Architecture, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia ; e-mail : cutnuraini@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

³ Lecturer, Magister of Regional and Urban Planning, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia ; e-mail : abdi_sugiarto@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

* Corresponding Author : Cut Nuraini

Abstract: Tourism is a sector strategy in encouraging regional economic growth, cultural preservation, and improving community welfare. Binjai City, as one of the buffer areas of Medan Metropolitan, has a number of areas that have the potential to be developed into leading tourist destinations. However, until now there has been no directed and integrated development strategy for areas that have this potential. This research aims to identify and analyze the potential for the development of leading tourist areas in Binjai City through the Mixed Methods approach, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The focus of the study is directed at three strategic areas, namely Taman Merdeka Binjai, the Binjai Grand Mosque Area, and the Jalan Veteran Culinary Village, which have strong historical, socio-cultural, and local economic potential but have not been optimally exploited. Data was collected through a survey of 150 respondents consisting of tourists, MSME actors, local communities, and government officials, as well as in-depth interviews with 12 key informants. The results of the quantitative analysis showed that the attractiveness of the area and community support received the highest score in respondents' perception, while infrastructure and the use of digital technology are aspects that still require special attention. Qualitative analysis supports these findings, where various technical and institutional constraints are still found that hinder sustainable development. The results of data integration show that the potential for the development of leading tourist areas in Binjai City is quite high in terms of location, cultural value, and support from the local community. However, to realize a competitive region, strategic interventions are needed in the form of improving the quality of infrastructure, digitizing promotions, and collaboration between sectors. Policy recommendations are filled with institutional capacity strengthening, community empowerment, and the establishment of tourism development programs based on local and sustainable potential.

Keywords: Binjai, Development, Potential, Strategy, Tourism

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1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the leading sectors in regional development, not only because of its contribution to increasing local original income (PAD), but also because of its ability to create jobs, encourage the growth of MSMEs, and strengthen local cultural identity. In the context of Indonesia, which is rich in cultural diversity and natural resources, the development of the tourism sector is a strategic step that supports sustainable economic development. This is also in line with the national policy in encouraging non-metropolitan areas to develop leading tourist destinations as drivers of the local economy.

One of the areas that has great potential but has not been worked on to the maximum is Binjai City, which is located in North Sumatra Province and is part of the Mebidangro national strategic area (Medan-Binjai-Deliserdang-Karo). This city has a strategic role as a buffer city and connectivity node between Medan City and Langkat Regency. Its geographical location on the main Sumatra route and is crossed by vital infrastructure such as the Binjai-

Pangkalan Brandan and Binjai-Langsa Toll Roads makes it a very potential area to be developed as a tourism area (Haloho & Sugiarto, 2024).

However, despite this potential, the development of the tourism sector in Binjai City is still fairly stagnant. Until 2023, there has been no formal classification from the Regional Government regarding leading tourist areas that can be prioritized in planning documents such as the RPJMD. In fact, the contribution of the tourism sector to the Binjai City PAD is still low, not reaching 10% of the total annual PAD (Binjai City Tourism Office, 2024). This shows that there is an inequality between the potential and realization of tourism sector development that needs serious attention. In this context, this study raises the topic of the study of the potential development of leading tourist areas in Binjai City. There are three main areas that are the focal points of this study: 1) Binjai Merdeka Park in Binjai Kota District, which is a public open space and has historical value as a center of activities for city residents, 2) The Binjai Grand Mosque area and its surrounding historical buildings have the potential to become religious and cultural tourism destinations, 3) Binjai Culinary Village is around Veteran Street, which is thriving as a hub for local culinary and creative economy.

The three areas show a diversity of characteristics and potential that can be developed into leading tourist areas. However, in practice, there are still limitations in providing facilities, strengthening attractions, and integration between regions that support the creation of sustainable tourism experiences. In addition, the low use of digital platforms and technology-based promotions are also obstacles in reaching the wider tourism market (Haloho & Sugiarto, 2024).

Furthermore, it is important to see that in the development of a leading tourist area, community participation and social structure have a very significant role. The Linda et al. (2024) study highlights how community character and social interaction patterns that are not taken into account in the development process can hinder the success of community-based development programs. This is relevant in the context of Binjai, where community involvement in tourism management is still very limited.

Another problem that cannot be ignored is the connectivity and transportation aspects. According to Purba et al. (2024), the success of a tourist area is not only determined by the uniqueness of its tourist attractions, but also by the efficiency of space utilization and ease of accessibility. Binjai City, which has a main road network and is passed by toll roads, should be able to integrate tourist areas in the local and regional transportation system. However, the reality on the ground shows that there is still limited access to areas such as Lauk Denai which is very potential but isolated.

On the other hand, digital transformation in the tourism sector is a new challenge that must be responded to by local governments. Based on a study by Nasution et al. (2022), the use of information and communication technology (ICT) such as social media, reservation applications, and digital maps has been proven to be able to increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations. Unfortunately, Binjai City does not have an organized and integrated digital tourism promotion system, even basic information about tourist areas is not available online thoroughly.

The absence of an adaptive tourism area development strategy based on local potential shows that there is a gap in research and policy. In fact, as stated by Sugiarto et al. (2023), an increase in tourist visits that is systematically managed can have a significant impact on increasing PAD, especially if supported by the strengthening of supporting sectors such as culinary, transportation, and the creative economy. Unfortunately, there has not been much research that comprehensively discusses spatial, social, economic, and technological integration in tourism development in Binjai. This is an important gap that is to be answered through this research.

This research aims to identify the potential of tourist areas that can be developed in a superior way in Binjai City, examine the supporting and inhibiting factors, and develop a development strategy based on local potential, community involvement, and regional connectivity. The benefits of this research are not only limited to theoretical contributions in the development of urban tourism planning literature, but also provide practical input for local governments and other stakeholders in formulating future policy directions for the development of tourist areas.

Thus, this research is very important to answer the challenge of stagnation of tourism development in Binjai City as well as fill the gap in academic studies in determining superior tourist areas that are data-based, participatory, and contextual.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Theory of Tourism Area Development

The development of tourist areas is part of the regional development strategy that aims to create economic, social, and environmental value through the use of local potential. According to Gunn & Var (2021), tourism development must consider elements of attraction, accessibility, facilities, promotion, and support of the local community. In the context of secondary cities such as Binjai, this process must be carried out in an integrated manner with spatial planning and local government policies.

Theory of Tourist Attraction

The theory of tourist attraction explains that tourists are encouraged to visit a destination if there is a uniqueness that is natural, cultural, artificial, or spiritual. According to Putra & Andayani (2022), tourist attractions can be categorized into three main aspects: attractions, accessibility, and amenities. Consistently developed attractions will strengthen the destination's positioning in the regional tourism map.

Community Participation Theory

In community-based development, community participation is a key element in ensuring the sustainability of the program. Effendi and Rambe (2023) emphasized that community involvement not only in operational activities, but also in the planning and decision-making process, will encourage a sense of belonging to the developed tourist area.

Digital Information System Theory in Tourism

Digital transformation has changed the way tourist destinations interact with the market. Nasution et al. (2022) stated that the digitization of tourism promotions, information, and services through social media, official websites, and map applications has a great influence on tourist interest and satisfaction. Strengthening digital branding is urgently needed, especially for small cities that compete with big destinations.

Accessibility and Connectivity Theory

According to Purba et al. (2024), accessibility is the main supporting factor in attracting tourist visits. Ease of transportation, travel time, and integration of road networks with tourist locations greatly determine the affordability of the destination. In the context of Binjai, the existence of toll roads and regional connecting routes is an important capital that must be optimized.

Previous Research

Lubis & Pohan (2022) in their research in Deli Serdang Regency compiled an index of nature-based tourism potential using a quantitative approach and produced a mapping of the classification of tourist attractions. However, this research has not touched on social and participatory aspects.

Hutasuhut (2023) examines public perception of the development of tourist areas in Tebing Tinggi City and emphasizes the importance of involving local residents as partners in management. These findings reinforce the urgency of a participatory qualitative approach.

Saragih & Simorangkir (2021) review the role of digitalization in tourism branding in Pematangsiantar. They found that areas that actively used social media experienced a significant increase in visits.

Nugroho & Tarigan (2022) in a study on community-based tourism in Medan stated that tourist areas managed directly by local communities tend to have higher sustainability than areas that are completely controlled by investors or the government.

Linda et al. (2024) show how social character and gender relations help shape the dynamics of settlement and regional development based on local culture, which is very relevant if it is associated with the character of the Binjai community.

Conceptual Framework

Based on previous theories and findings, several research variables are determined as follows:

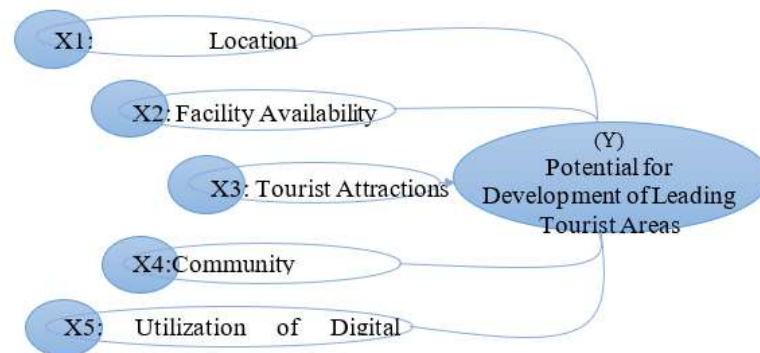


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework

Source: Personal Writing, 2025

This framework assumes that the better the conditions of accessibility, facilities, attraction, community involvement, and digital support, the greater the opportunity for an area to be developed as a leading tourism in Binjai City.

3. Proposed Method

This study uses a mixed methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods, with the aim of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the potential and challenges of developing leading tourist areas in Binjai City, where the qualitative approach is focused on exploring the in-depth perspectives of stakeholders, while the quantitative approach is used to measure the influence of variables such as accessibility, facilities, attractions, community participation, and the use of digital technology to the potential of leading tourist areas.

This research was carried out in three potential tourist areas in Binjai City, namely Binjai Merdeka Park (Binjai Kota District), Binjai Grand Mosque Area and its surroundings (Binjai Kota District), and Veteran Street Culinary Village (Binjai Kota District), based on the results of initial identification through field observation that showed great potential but has not been maximized in terms of promotion, facilities, and destination management strategies.

This research was carried out in the period of August 2024 to December 2024, including the stage of field observation, primary data collection, data processing, and the preparation of strategies for the development of leading tourist areas.

The population in this study includes all elements involved or related to the development of tourist areas in Binjai City, including local and out-of-area tourists, communities around tourist areas, MSME actors and tourist attraction managers, as well as local government officials in the tourism sector, while for the quantitative approach, a sample of 150 respondents was determined through purposive sampling techniques, namely selection based on certain criteria such as having visited tourist attractions, living around the area, or being involved in tourism economic activities, while the qualitative approach used the snowball sampling technique with a total of 10-15 key informants consisting of official officials, community leaders, tourism managers, and MSME actors.

The variables in this study consist of independent variables, namely location accessibility (X1), availability of tourist facilities (X2), tourist attraction (X3), community participation (X4), and use of digital technology (X5), as well as one dependent variable, namely the potential for the development of leading tourist areas (Y), which will be measured through specific indicators from questionnaires and interview guidelines.

The types of data used in this study include primary data obtained through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and field observations. The data collection techniques in this study included the distribution of questionnaires to 150 respondents to collect quantitative data on variables X1 to X5, in-depth interviews with key informants to obtain qualitative data and quantitative data describing social and institutional contexts, field observations to record the physical conditions of the area and community activities, and statistical data from related agencies.

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency, and Likert scores through the SPSS 20 application to measure the level of potential and contribution of each variable to the development of tourist areas, while qualitative data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (2021) method, which included the process of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions by arranging the results in thematic tabulations that support quantitative findings, and the two results were then compared through triangulation techniques to obtain valid, contextual, and evidence-based recommendations in the development of leading tourist areas in Binjai City.

4. Results and Discussion

General Description of Respondents and Research Locations

This research was conducted on 150 respondents consisting of local tourists, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the surrounding community, and government officials related to the tourism sector in Binjai City. This research also involved 12 key informants through an in-depth interview approach representing community leaders, tourism area managers, and representatives of technical agencies.

Based on the survey results, the characteristics of respondents in general can be explained through several indicators as follows:

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Number (People)	Percentage (%)
Man	78	52%
Woman	72	48%
Total	150	100%

Source: Researcher Survey, Year 2025

Table 1. shows that the majority of respondents in this study were men at 52%, while women amounted to 48%. This shows that the gender distribution is relatively balanced, and the two groups have almost equal involvement in tourism and creative economy activities in the research area.

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents by Age

Age (Years)	Number (People)	Percentage (%)
17–25	45	30%
26–35	60	40%
36–45	30	20%
>45	15	10%
Total	150	100%

Source: Researcher Survey, Year 2025

From Table 2, it can be seen that the age group of 26–35 years dominates with a percentage of 40%, followed by the age group of 17–25 years as much as 30%. This shows that the majority of respondents come from the productive age group, which generally has a high level of mobility and involvement in tourism activities and urban area development.

Table 3. Characteristics of respondents by occupation

Work	Number (People)	Percentage (%)
Student	30	20%
Private Employees	45	30%
MSME Actors	30	20%
Government Apparatus	15	10%
Other	30	20%
Total	150	100%

Source : Researcher Survey, Year 2025

Based on Table 3, it can be seen that the most work groups are private employees (30%), followed by MSME actors and students at 20% each. Respondents from government apparatus amounted to 10%. This composition shows that the majority of respondents are part of economic actors and community groups who are directly involved in tourist area activities, thus providing a relevant perspective on the potential development of the area.

To strengthen the understanding of the geographical and spatial context of the research site, the following is shown a map of the location of the three tourist areas that are the object of the study, as follows:



Figure 2. Map of Research Locations: Featured Tourist Areas in Binjai City
Source: Researcher's Design, 2025

These three areas are located within the administrative area of Binjai Kota District and have a strategic position around transportation nodes and government office areas, making them the center of public and economic activities of the community. The map shows three main location points that are the focus of the research, namely Taman Merdeka Binjai as a historic public open space, the Grand Mosque area as a religious and cultural tourism center, and the Veteran Street Culinary Village as an MSME and creative economy area.

Quantitative Research Results

The results of the quantitative research were obtained from a questionnaire distributed to 150 respondents using a Likert scale of 1–5. The five independent variables studied consisted of location accessibility (X1), availability of tourist facilities (X2), tourist attraction (X3), community participation (X4), and use of digital technology (X5), as well as one dependent variable, namely the potential for the development of leading tourist areas (Y).

Here is the average score of each variable based on respondents' assessments:

Table 4. Average Respondent Perception Score on Research Variables

Variabel	Average Score	Interpretasi
X1: Location Accessibility	4.10	Tall
X2: Availability of Tourism Facilities	3.85	Tall
X3: Tourist Attractions	4.20	Very High
X4: Community Participation	3.95	Tall
X5: Utilization of Digital Technology	3.40	Enough
Y: Potential for Tourism Area Development	4.05	Tall

Source: SPSS 20, by Researcher in 2025

Interpretation of the score follows the following criteria:

- 1.00–1.80 = Very Low,
- 1.81–2.60 = Low,
- 2.61–3.40 = Enough,
- 3.41–4.20 = Height,
- 4.21–5.00 = Very High.

From the table above, it can be seen that all variables obtained an average value above 3.40 except X5 (Utilization of Digital Technology), which is in the sufficient category. The variable with the highest score was tourist attraction (X3) with a score of 4.20, indicating that respondents considered the attractions of areas such as Taman Merdeka and Kampung Kuliner to be very potential to attract tourists. High scores on accessibility (X1) and community participation (X4) also indicate that the affordability and support aspects of local residents have been doing well.

On the other hand, a sufficient score on the X5 variable indicates the need to improve the strategy of digitization of tourism promotion and management in Binjai City, especially in the management of tourist area information online and interactively.

Qualitative Research Results

The results of the qualitative research were obtained from in-depth interviews with 12 key informants consisting of community leaders, tourism managers, MSME actors, and government officials. The analysis was carried out using a thematic approach according to Miles & Huberman (2021) through the stages of data reduction, categorization, and conclusion drawn. The results of field observations were also involved to strengthen these qualitative findings.

Theme 1: Accessibility and Location

The third tourist area is located in Binjai Kota District and is directly connected to major roads such as Jalan Veteran, Jalan Jenderal Sudirman, and Jalan KH. Wahid Hasyim. Taman Merdeka is located in the center of traffic nodes, near terminals, offices, and other public facilities.

"If you go to Taman Merdeka, just go straight, everyone will know. It's a strategic place."
(Informant 1, local residents)

Supporting Documentation: See Figure 2 : Map of the locations of Taman Merdeka, Masjid Raya, and Kampung Kuliner — showing strategic and close proximity in the core area of the city.

Theme 2: Characteristics of Tourist Attractions

Each region has a strong identity, outlined in the following figure:



Figure 3. The Visual Condition of Binjai Merdeka Park from Three Perspectives
Source: Researcher Documentation, 2025

Taman Merdeka is a center of public activity with a landscape of large shady trees and a fairly wide pedestrian path. Based on the results of observations, this park has a high level of accessibility because it is located right in the heart of the city and is surrounded by major traffic nodes such as Jalan Veteran and Jenderal Sudirman. However, limitations in terms of tourist directions and tourist-friendly facilities such as public toilets and interactive benches still need to be improved.



Figure 4. View of the Front of the Binjai Grand Mosque

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2025

The Binjai Grand Mosque is one of the centers of religious and cultural activities in Binjai City. From the results of visual observation, this mosque not only functions as a place of worship, but also becomes a center of crowds for people and informal economic actors. The presence of street vendors in the vicinity shows the integration between religious activities and the local economy, although the lighting at night still needs to be strengthened to make the area more welcoming to out-of-town visitors. This area also has the potential to be developed as a better managed religious tourism destination, especially through the arrangement of the area and supporting facilities that support the comfort of visitors.



Figure 5. MSME Activities in the Culinary Village Area, Jalan Veteran Binjai

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2025

The Culinary Village on Veteran Street is one of the economic nodes of the community in the central area of Binjai. Based on observations, this area is occupied by food and beverage traders who sell with carts and light tents. The existence of these MSMEs shows high microeconomic dynamics, although in terms of area management and parking arrangement it still needs to be improved to support the comfort of tourists.

Based on field observations and visual documentation, there are three strategic location points that represent the potential of a vibrant and competitive urban tourist area in Binjai City. First, *Taman Merdeka Binjai* is a green open space that not only provides pedestrian facilities and a shady atmosphere with large trees, but also serves as a center for community activities and official government events. Second, the *Binjai Grand Mosque* is a historic religious architectural icon with a distinctive mirror dome, and is surrounded by informal economic activities that enliven the surrounding environment. Third, the *Veteran Street Culinary Village* is a crowded point that reflects the local economy from afternoon to night. This location meets a row of culinary MSMEs that attract the attention of local and out-of-region tourists, as stated by an informant:

"In the afternoon, Jalan Veteran is full, there is food of all kinds. There are also many visitors from outside the city." (*Informant 7, MSME traders*)

Theme 3: Condition of Supporting Facilities

Despite the high appeal, some informants highlighted the limitations of public facilities such as seating, information boards, public toilets, and regular parking areas.

"The toilets are there, but few. If there are a lot of seats, they will be up for grabs. It should be more complete."

(*Informant 3, local tourists*)

"The lighting in the mosque area is still dark at night. Parking is also chaotic."
(Informant 6, environmental administrator)

Theme 4: Community Participation in Tourism Activities

Tourism activities in the third area are mostly supported by the involvement of local residents. Culinary MSMEs on Veteran Street are an independently managed community initiative. Several communities routinely hold open events at Taman Merdeka.

"We suspect that if there is an activity, the electricity of MSME tents is sometimes a joint venture."
(Informant 10, head of the culinary community)

"Young people are also active, some make music shows in the park every Saturday."
(Informant 8, community activist)

Theme 5: Limitations in the Use of Digital Technology

The majority of informants stated that the promotion of tourism in Binjai City is still minimal in boldness. There is no integration of digital tourism data, event ticket bookings, or application-based interactive promotions.

"There is no official website yet. Instagram just uses each trader's personal account."
(Informant 4, park activity manager)

Field data shows that the third area has high tourism potential, especially in terms of location, attraction, and community participation. However, there are still challenges in the form of facility restrictions and a lack of digital transformation as a supporting instrument for regional promotion and management.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

To obtain a comprehensive picture of the actual condition of the leading tourist areas in Binjai City, an integration was carried out between quantitative findings through a survey of 150 respondents and qualitative results obtained from in-depth interviews and visual field documentation. This approach allows for a deeper understanding because it connects the respondents' perceptions with the empirical context found directly in the three main tourist areas, namely Taman Merdeka Binjai, Masjid Raya Binjai and its surroundings, and Jalan Veteran Binjai Culinary Village.

In general, respondents perceived the five main variables to show positive results. The accessibility of the location received an average score of 4.10, indicating that most respondents felt that the tourist area was easy to reach. This is confirmed by field findings that show that the third location is on the main road of Binjai City which is easily accessible by private and public vehicles, and is close to the node of urban activities. Taman Merdeka, for example, contains public facilities and is easily accessible from various parts of the city. Likewise, the Great Mosque area which is in the government area, as well as the Culinary Village which is integrated with the creative economy center of the local residents.

The variable of the availability of scoring facilities averaged 3.85, which is relatively high but still keeps a number of critical records from the observation results. Some respondents assessed that the existence of facilities such as public toilets, garbage cans, parking areas, and night lighting still needed to be improved. This is in line with qualitative findings that show that not all areas are equipped with proper tourism support facilities, especially in the area around the Binjai Grand Mosque which is more focused on worship functions than tourism functions.

Meanwhile, the attractiveness of the area showed the highest score of 4.20. The majority of respondents assessed that the third location has unique characteristics, ranging from the beautiful and interactive atmosphere of the city park in Taman Merdeka, to the historical and religious value in the Binjai Grand Mosque, as well as local culinary at the Jalan Veteran Culinary Village. These results are supported by visual documentation that shows the density of citizen activity in the three locations, especially on weekends and holidays.

Community participation obtained a score of 3.95, with a qualitative explanation that featured the involvement of MSME actors, local communities, and the village in maintaining cleanliness, promoting activities, and managing trade stalls. Some residents even took the initiative to hold community events independently such as art performances in parks and thematic culinary bazaars that added to the tourist attraction.

On the other hand, the variable of digital technology utilization obtained a relatively low score of 3.40. The results of interviews and observations explain that there is no integrated digital platform that actively promotes this tourist area. Social media has not been utilized optimally by local governments and business actors, while local tourism applications are not yet available specifically for Binjai City.

The following table summarizes the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative data that have been determined.

Table 5. Summary of Integration of Linkages Between Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Variabel	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data	Relationship Findings
Location Accessibility	High (4.10)	Easy to reach, in the center of the city	Consistent and strong
Facility Availability	High (3.85)	Some facilities are still limited	Quite different
Area Attraction	Very High (4.20)	Unique, crowded, locally iconic	Line
Community Participation	High (3.95)	Active, involving business actors and citizens	Line
Utilization of Digital Technology	Enough (3.40)	Still weak, promotion not optimal	Consistent

Source: Summarized by Researcher, 2025

Based on the integration data carried out, it can be seen that the third leading tourist area in Binjai City shows great potential in terms of strategic location, distinctive attractions, and active involvement of local communities. On the other hand, weaknesses still exist in the aspect of physical facilities and the use of digital technology, which require special attention and sustainable development strategies so that this third region can optimally increase competitiveness and contribute to the local economy.

Discussion

This study shows that the three tourist areas studied in Binjai City—Taman Merdeka, Masjid Raya Area, and Culinary Village—have strong potential in terms of affordability, diversity of attractions, and enthusiasm for community involvement in management. However, there are several dimensions that are still a challenge, such as the lack of supporting facilities, unintegrated space management, and lack of use of digital technology.

These results reinforce the findings of Nuraini (2021) who emphasized that spatial attachment-based regional planning is an important prerequisite for the sustainability of space utilization, especially in the context of urban public areas. In the context of Taman Merdeka and Kampung Kuliner, the emotional attachment of residents is reflected in the use of space that is repetitive and community-oriented. However, the absence of integrated spatial arrangement causes tourism functions to be less optimal.

In addition, the Binjai Grand Mosque area, which has historical value and religious-cultural potential, shows the need for architectural preservation. This finding is in line with the view of Nuraini (2024) who emphasizes that the preservation of traditional architecture can be developed through a tectonic values approach, by combining the symbolic aspects and social functions of buildings. The Great Mosque as a spiritual center and community identity must be placed in the planning of an integrated history-based tourist area.

In terms of the local economy, the Culinary Village shows high MSME activity and social interaction, but it is still not supported by adequate institutions and infrastructure. This finding is consistent with Nuraini's (2019) study which states that the morphological form of space and social networks in productive areas must be adjusted to community adaptation patterns to support local economic sustainability. The same thing is also emphasized by Hidayat et al. (2023) that the management of public areas requires community involvement in every stage of planning so that usefulness and a sense of belonging can grow together.

Furthermore, the integration of cultural values and planning structures has also been studied by Nuraini et al. (2023) in the concept of Three-World Structures, namely the

integration between aspects of locality, spatial planning, and social systems. This concept provides inspiration for how Taman Merdeka and the Grand Mosque Area can be managed not only as tourist attractions, but as living space entities that reflect community values.

In the context of connectivity and the influence of infrastructure development, Haloho & Sugiarto (2024) show that national strategic projects such as the Binjai–Pangkalan Brandan Toll Road also accelerate the potential of the surrounding area, including access to local tourist destinations. This finding intersects with field data that the increase in the flow of visitors in Taman Merdeka and Kampung Kuliner is greatly influenced by the ease of new accessibility. However, if it is not followed by institutional strengthening and spatial management, the region is vulnerable to uncontrolled development pressures.

The management of cultural-based settlements and public spaces was also explained by Aini et al. (2023), who highlighted the importance of spatial adjustment to the social structure of local communities. In the context of the Binjai Grand Mosque, this approach is important so that the development of religious tourism remains in line with the social and spiritual functions of the local community.

In contrast to the results of this study, Linda et al. (2024) said that in the Mandailing residential area, the structure of gender and cultural interaction is the main challenge in building understanding between actors in regional development. Meanwhile, in Binjai, the challenges are more technical such as the lack of facilities and supporting infrastructure for tourist areas.

Meanwhile, Sugiarto et al. (2023) found that the increase in the number of tourists and the growth of the culinary sector correlated with regional tax revenue. This opens up opportunities for Binjai City to further formalize the culinary tourism sector through fiscal and institutional instruments, especially in the Culinary Village.

6. Conclusions

Based on the findings of qualitative and quantitative integration of three leading tourist areas in Binjai City—namely Binjai Merdeka Park, Binjai Grand Mosque Area, and Veteran Street Culinary Village—it can be summarized that the potential of this third area is quite large, both from the strategic area, proximity to the center of public activities, to the high level of participation of the community and local business actors. However, at the same time, there are still several obstacles such as the lack of adequate physical facilities, the low use of digital technology in tourism promotion, and the lack of optimal comprehensive and sustainable institutional support.

To answer these challenges, strategic and measurable steps are needed, including: first, improving regional infrastructure such as improving sanitation, night lighting, sitting areas, and pedestrian paths that are friendly to all age groups; second, a location-based digital integration system to support tourism information and marketing of MSME products through local applications or cooperation with national platforms; third, community empowerment through tourism awareness training, destination management training, and the formation of community-based tourism management groups; Fourth, the preparation of a collaborative destination development plan between local governments, business actors, and academics, as well as regulatory support that is responsive to the dynamics of city tourism.

These steps are important to be carried out simultaneously and based on data so that the development of tourist areas in Binjai City is not only ceremonial, but also able to encourage local economic growth in an inclusive and sustainable manner, so that this city can compete with other tourist destinations in North Sumatra consistently in the long term.

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