



The Role of Cultural Heritage Sites as Centers for Education, National Identity, and Tourism-Based Economy in Sarmi Regency, Papua

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ABSTRACT

Sarmi Regency, Papua, holds World War II heritage, yet has not been managed as cultural heritage. This exploratory-qualitative study describes cultural heritage objects in Sarmi Regency and analyzes their roles as educational center, national identity, and heritage tourism economy, through library research, field surveys, and interviews with object owners, experts, officials, and community leaders. Results show 80 suspected heritage objects, including 1 structure and 7 objects designated under Law No. 11 of 2010, serving as historical learning resources, evidence of national identity, and tourism assets driving the local economy. The study recommends integrated management among government, academics, and communities.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of culture is a constitutional mandate that has been ingrained since the beginning of Indonesian independence. Article 32 of the 1945 Constitution affirms the state's obligation to advance national culture, which was later strengthened through amendments to: "The state advances Indonesian national culture among world civilizations by guaranteeing the freedom of the people to maintain and develop their cultural values." In line with the regional autonomy policy based on Law No. 32 of 2004, the authority to manage culture is transferred to regional governments, including the responsibility for preserving cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage, as defined by Law No. 11 of 2010, is a material cultural heritage in the form of objects, buildings, structures, sites, and areas that need to be preserved because they have important value for history, science, education, religion, and/or culture. Harry Widiyanto (2017:1) places cultural heritage as the nation's cultural wealth that must be protected, developed, and utilized for the prosperity of the people.

Sarmi Regency, on the northern coast of Papua, faces directly over the Pacific Ocean. The name Sarmi itself is an acronym for five major ethnic groups: the Sobey, Armati, Rumbuai, Manirem, and Isirawa, as noted by Dutch anthropologist Van Kouhen Houven. The region harbors two layers of rich historical heritage: local cultural heritage (Karwari traditional houses, traditional boats, dances, and handicrafts) and extensive World War II relics, as Sarmi served as a Japanese defense base and the site of fierce fighting with Allied forces in 1944.

However, systematic research into the role of Sarmi's cultural heritage in its three strategic functions—education, national identity, and tourism economy—has never been conducted comprehensively. Previous studies have been limited to physical inventories or partial archaeological studies. This gap is the reason for this research. This research aims to describe and document the objects and roles of Sarmi cultural heritage as an educational center, a form of national identity, and a tourism economic asset

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture, according to Koentjaraningrat (2015:146), is the totality of human ideas and works that must be studied, along with the results of those thoughts and works. Culture is not a collection of stand-alone traits, but rather an interconnected system, where each aspect influences the entire societal system (Djekky Morin, 2012). Cultural heritage itself is divided into tangible and intangible cultural heritage—both of which constitute the identity of a society that is passed down across generations.

Based on PP No. 1 of 2022 and Law No. 11 of 2010 Article 1, cultural heritage includes: (1) cultural heritage objects, namely natural or man-made objects that are movable or immovable with a close connection to culture and history; (2) cultural heritage buildings, namely built structures with walls and/or roofs; and (3) cultural heritage structures, namely built structures that are integrated with nature to fulfill human activities. Preservation of cultural heritage includes three pillars: protection, development, and utilization (Edi Sedyawati, 2007).

The Role of Cultural Heritage in Education

Historical learning resources based on real objects provide a different learning experience than classroom learning. Arsyad (2011:26) states that learning media can clarify the presentation of information, increase motivation, and overcome the limitations of the senses, space, and time. By visiting historical sites directly, students can build historical memories that strengthen their understanding of the context, feelings, and actions of people in the past.

Field research-based learning at cultural heritage sites also fosters critical thinking skills from an early age. The ability to research one's surroundings provides practical skills that don't require higher education but can be developed as early as high school (Center for Employee Training, 2021:8).

Cultural Heritage as National Identity

According to Kaelan (2007, in Dwi Sulisworo et al., 2012:4), national identity is a manifestation of cultural values that grow in the life of a nation with unique characteristics that distinguish it from other nations. Law No. 11 of 2010 firmly places cultural heritage as a tangible manifestation of the nation's history and civilization. Pharmacytha & Savitri (2023:1) add that the important values contained in cultural heritage are the reason why it must be protected – the loss of heritage means the loss of evidence of a nation's historical journey.

Cultural Heritage and Tourism Economy

Entering the 21st century, tourism has developed into one of the largest industries in the world with relatively stable growth since World War II (Dananjaya Axioma in Oka A. Yoeti, 2004:11). Cultural heritage objects, as man-made resources, can be utilized as tourist attractions as long as they are packaged with adequate information (Wanny Rahardjo Wahyudi in Oka A. Yoeti, 2004:117). Integrated cultural heritage management not only preserves heritage, but also opens up economic opportunities through MSMEs, employment, and history-based creative economies.

METHODOLOGY

This research is exploratory with a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it aims to understand the phenomenon in depth based on descriptive data, rather than testing statistical hypotheses (Ma'unah, 2013). The research locations include three areas whose objects or structures have been designated as cultural heritage: Wakde Island, Tanjung Batu Village, and Holmafen Village, Sarmi Regency, Papua.

Data Collection Techniques

Secondary data was collected from historical archives in Sarmi Regency, scientific books, articles, and previous research reports. Sources were accessed from the Papua Regional Library and Archives, the History Education Study Program Library of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Uncen, the Sarmi Regency Regional Library and Archives, and the Library of the Papuan Cultural Studies and Values Center. Digital searches were also conducted online to supplement references related to cultural heritage.

Direct observations were then conducted at three research locations to obtain primary data on the physical condition of the objects, the geographic and environmental context, and the dynamics of cultural heritage use by the community and government. Observations focused on the community owners of the objects and the government as a development supporter, using a previously prepared observation sheet.

Next, selective interviews were conducted with four groups of informants:

- Owners of cultural heritage objects, namely those who have civil rights to the objects.
- The Cultural Heritage Expert Team (TACB), which is certified in various fields (archaeology, anthropology, history, architecture, geology, law).
- Government officials, from the Cultural, Tourism and Cultural Preservation Center Sectors.
- Community leaders, including traditional, religious, educational and youth leaders.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed descriptively and interpretively. Information from the field, interviews, and literature was combined (source triangulation) to produce a comprehensive understanding of the existence and role of cultural heritage in Sarimi Regency.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on research by the Cultural Affairs Office and the Cultural Heritage Expert Team, 80 objects suspected of being designated as cultural heritage (ODCB) have been recorded in Sarimi Regency. Of these, one structure and seven objects have undergone a hearing and received official designation. The details are as follows.

Airstrip (Wakde Island)

The runway is located at coordinates S:1°56'10.48" E:139°00'20.96", stretching 1.7 km with a west-east orientation and a maximum width of 70 meters. Its construction is made of sand mixed with cement and asphalt with a steel frame, accompanied by four small runway wings as an aircraft parking area. This runway was built by the Japanese as a combat base and was later captured and expanded by Allied forces. The current condition is overgrown with bushes, but the basic structure is still intact.

Cannon Barrel (Wakde Island)

The cannon barrel is located at coordinates S1°56'39.431" E139°00'50.656", with a length of 292 cm and a diameter of 50 cm, 3 cm thick. The base still has a hole and lock. It is rusted (reddish brown), the tip is cut off, and the cannon foot is no longer there. It is suspected to be Japanese property.

Cannon Foot (Wakde Island)

The cannon's base is located at coordinates S:1°56'47.29" E:139°01'3.01", near the southern coast of Wakde Island. It is upside down and partially buried in the ground. It is 1.20 m high and 1.80 m wide. It consists of a barrel mount, a 55 cm diameter central column, and five legs (one missing due to rust). It is coated with black tar paint and made of pure steel.

Air Attack Artillery Weapon 1 (Tanjung Batu Village)

This weapon is located at coordinates S:1°57'28.0" E:138°50'38.4", facing west. It is a long-range weapon that is still relatively intact: 40 cm muzzle diameter, 336 cm barrel length, 100 cm recuperator, two 30 cm diameter stirrups, and right and left supports. Made of steel.

Air Attack Artillery Weapon 2 (Tanjung Batu Village)

Located at coordinates 1°57'27.6"S 138°50'37.9"E, oriented east. Extant components include the barrel, pedestal, steering wheel, gun mount (partially embedded), and control handle. The barrel is 370 cm long, 22 cm wide at the bottom, and 8 cm in diameter. It is corroded and partially buried.

Air Attack Artillery Weapon 3 (Tanjung Batu Village)

Located at coordinates 1°57'27.4"S 138°50'37.8"E, facing northeast. Its physical specifications are identical to Artillery 1 (barrel length 336 cm, diameter 40 cm). The body of the weapon has 6 holes from dynamite pipes and 1 scar suspected to be caused by shrapnel or grenades during the Japanese-Allied battle.

Ship Anchor (Holmafen Village)

The anchor is located at coordinates S:1°57'57" E:138°53'04.5". Length 212 cm, width 184 cm, thickness 25 cm, weight 1,500 kg. Type U.S. Navy Stockless Anchor (Type 803-860337). On the right shoulder is written "US NAVY" and the left is written "A4714 PSF"; on the main stem (shank) is also written "US NAVY". Made of cast steel.

Ship Anchor (Wakde Island)

Located at coordinates S:1°56'38.28" E:139°00'52.03". Total length 250 cm (from head to crown), width of the arch section 180 cm, maximum thickness 20 cm. The head section is equipped with a ring shackle measuring 51×35 cm. Made of steel.

The Role of Cultural Heritage as an Education Center

Cultural heritage sites in Sarmi Regency, particularly World War II relics, provide a learning context that textbooks cannot replace. Several high schools in Sarmi Regency (SMA 1 and SMA YPK Ebenhaier) have directed students to engage in independent fieldwork: visiting the Yamagata Monument, ship anchors in Holmafen Village, artillery pieces in Tanjung Batu Village, and relics on Wakde Island. These visits provide a vivid picture of the battle between Japan

and the Allies in 1944, when Japan defended Sarmi as a Pacific base and the Allies invaded from land, sea, and air.

Based on interviews with YPK Ebenhaier High School teachers with backgrounds in history, sociology, and Pancasila (May 13, 2026), formal educational media remains limited due to inadequate facilities. However, teachers continue to encourage students to study independently at cultural heritage sites, allowing them to directly explore history through the dimensions of time and technology.

Airplane runways, ship anchors, and artillery pieces serve as concrete educational media that help students visualize past events. Using real objects in history learning activates both cognitive and affective aspects (Arsyad, 2011:26).

The Sarmi cultural heritage site serves as a research laboratory for several disciplines. Archaeology examines the material context of physical objects, architecture, and the environment. History analyzes evidence to reconstruct events. Anthropology comprehensively studies the Sarmi people and their past technology. Artillery and aircraft runways also reflect advances in weaponry technology and defense strategies during the World War II era – data relevant to studies in engineering, physics, and the history of science.

The introduction of cultural heritage in the curriculum shapes the character of a younger generation who value national identity and have a sense of responsibility for historical heritage. Legal and ethical learning based on Law No. 11 of 2010 instills awareness that damaging, stealing, or illegally exploiting historical sites erases evidence of the nation's history. Preserving cultural heritage aims to preserve heritage, enhance national dignity, strengthen national identity, improve people's welfare, and promote heritage internationally (Center for Employee Training, 2021:16).

The Role of Cultural Heritage as a National Identity

The official designation through a meeting of the Cultural Heritage Expert Team and a decree by the Regent of Sarmi legally establishes these objects as part of the material identity of the Indonesian nation. The designation process takes place in four stages: registration by the object owner with the Cultural Service; verification and registration as an ODCB; field studies by TACBs from various scientific backgrounds (history, archeology, anthropology, geography); and status determination by the Regent of Sarmi through an official decree.

Each object represents a different national identity:

- Aircraft Runway: evidence of the Pacific military strategy that placed the Papua region, especially Sarmi, as a crucial battle zone in Indonesian and world history.
- Ship Anchor: a representation of the maritime history of the Pacific War and the technological developments of large cargo ships entering Sarmi during the war.
- Artillery Weapons: a reflection of the advancement of WWII weapons technology which is now a tangible proof of the defense of the Papua region.

As a national identity, the preservation of these objects fosters nationalism, strengthens unity amidst diversity, and provides physical evidence of history for future generations.

The Role of Cultural Heritage in the Tourism Economy

Visit data from the Sarmi Regency Cultural Affairs Office over the past three years shows the attention of various government agencies and international institutions to Sarmi's cultural heritage objects. The most visits came from the Japanese Government and the Japanese Embassy in Jakarta, with 15 people visiting World War II sites. The Ministry of Culture also monitored cultural heritage with 5 visitors, while the Cultural Preservation Center (BPK) Regional XXII of Papua Province sent 3 people to verify cultural assets. The Papua Province Culture and Tourism Office recorded 7 people for preservation coordination, followed by the Sarmi Regency Tourism Office with 2 people for tourism development. The Public Works Office and the Sarmi Regency Environment Office each sent 1 person for infrastructure and environmental studies, while the Education and Culture Office recorded 3 people for educational programs.

This data shows that although Sarmi's cultural heritage management is not yet optimal, these objects have attracted attention from both within and outside the country—including from the Japanese government and the Japanese Embassy in Jakarta, which sent 15 people. This represents a crucial starting point for the development of historical tourism.

The economic potential of Sarmi's cultural heritage can be developed through three channels:

- Empowering the local economy: revitalizing handicraft MSMEs, selling souvenirs, culinary specialties, and seafood—commodities that have become Sarmi's strengths.
- Job creation: opportunities for local tour guides explaining the history of World War II, site managers, and accommodation providers around cultural heritage areas.
- Creative economy development: connecting historical stories with art performances, cultural festivals, documentary films, and digital creative content.

To realize this potential, cultural heritage objects need to be equipped with adequate information for tourists: location maps, information boards showing directions, popular guidebooks, and guides who come from the local community and whose knowledge is enriched by the results of expert research.

DISCUSSION

These findings demonstrate the close relationship between the three roles of Sarmi's cultural heritage and its position compared to previous studies. Previous research has provided an important foundation for this study. The Papua Provincial Cultural Office, in collaboration with the Uncen Cultural Museum (2007), provided basic socio-cultural information on the people of the East Coast District, describing the marriage system, social organization, kinship, and cultural aspects of the local communities in Wakde Darat and Wakde Pulau.

The Papua Archaeological Center Research Team (2012) discovered potential colonial archaeology on Wakde Island and Liki Village, uncovering remains such as oil drums, Allied bullets, cargo ships, former Japanese warehouses and hospitals, Japanese caves, and various bottles. The Sarmi Regency Cultural Heritage Expert Team (2018) identified World War II remains on Wakde Island and proposed it as a cultural heritage site and tourist destination, with the discovery of 69 relics including caves, cannons, anchors, runways, aircraft engines, and bunkers. The Japanese Skeleton Repatriation Team (2024) sought information and identified human skeletons and World War II remains in Tokyo Village and Wakde Island, finding two individuals based on the Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) estimate along with artifacts in the form of a cauldron, an iron bucket, a bottle, and a food container. Subsequently, the Sarmi Regency Cultural Heritage Expert Team conducted two data collection and cultural heritage determination sessions: in 2024, four objects were designated (a cannon leg, a ship's anchor, an airplane runway, and a cannon barrel on Wakde Island), and in 2025, four other objects were designated (three long-range artillery pieces in Tanjung Batu Village and a ship's anchor in Holmafen Village). Overall, these series of studies provide a strong basis for physical inventory, but none have specifically analyzed the integrative role of Sarmi's cultural heritage in the three dimensions of education, national identity, and the tourism economy simultaneously. This study fills this gap by presenting an analysis of the integrative role of these three dimensions simultaneously.

Compared to the survey by the Sarmi Regency Cultural Heritage Expert Team (2018) which identified 69 World War II heritage objects on Wakde Island, the number of 80 suspected cultural heritage objects (ODCB) recorded in this study shows that the data collection process continues to develop and covers a wider area, namely Tanjung Batu Village and Holmafen Village which have not been widely studied previously. However, only 8 of the 80 objects (1 structure and 7 objects) have gone through an official determination hearing based on Law No. 11 of 2010, so that the other 72 objects still have suspected status and potentially face the risk of damage or loss of historical value if not immediately followed up legally.

The pattern of institutional visit data also strengthens the argument that recognition of Sarmi's cultural heritage has penetrated the national and international levels, as demonstrated by the visit of the Japanese Government and the Japanese Embassy in Jakarta, which reached 15 people – the highest number among all visiting agencies. However, visits from agencies directly involved in tourism development, namely the Sarmi Regency Tourism Office, were recorded at only 2 people, far lower than visits for monitoring or administrative verification (the Ministry of Culture, Regional Audit Board XXII, and the Papua Province Culture and Tourism Office). This gap indicates that attention to Sarmi's cultural heritage is still dominated by the interests of historical preservation and diplomacy, while its utilization as a tourism economic asset has not been an equal priority.

These two data patterns reinforce the argument that managing Sarmi's cultural heritage requires a three-way synergy between the government,

academics, and the heritage community, as recommended in the conclusion of this study. Without integrated management, there is a risk that the widely recognized educational and national identity values will not be matched by optimal economic benefits for the local community.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sarmi Regency boasts significant historical heritage, particularly from the World War II period, which has now received legal recognition as cultural heritage. Of the 80 identified objects suspected of being cultural heritage, one structure (an airstrip on Wakde Island) and seven objects (a cannon barrel, cannon base, two ship anchors on Wakde Island; three artillery pieces in Tanjung Batu Village; and one ship anchor in Holmafen Village) have been officially designated.

The three roles of Sarmi's cultural heritage are mutually supportive: as educational centers, these objects serve as direct learning resources that transcend the limitations of classrooms and textbooks; as national identities, their existence attests to the role of the Papua region in Pacific history and Indonesian history; and as tourism economic assets, their potential is significant for driving the local economy through the service and creative sectors, although current management still needs improvement. A comprehensive study of Sarmi's local history, encompassing the Zending period, Dutch rule, and World War II, needs to be compiled as an official reference for local history learning from elementary school through university. Furthermore, commitment and cooperation between the community and local government are needed in the preservation, protection, and management of historical sites.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has limitations in the scope of the survey location, which only covers three areas with officially designated cultural heritage objects, namely Wakde Island, Tanjung Batu Village, and Holmafen Village. Of the total of 80 identified suspected cultural heritage objects (ODCB), 72 other objects that have not gone through the official determination process have not been studied in depth in this study, so that a comprehensive picture of the potential and condition of all World War II heritage in Sarmi Regency has not been fully covered.

Further research is recommended to expand the scope of the study to all ODCBs that have not been established, including conducting quantitative studies on the economic impact of cultural heritage tourism on local community income, in order to strengthen the database for formulating policies for sustainable management of cultural heritage in Sarmi Regency.

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