

Historic Building Conservation Study in the Old Port Area of Donggala Old Town

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Abstract

Urban and port areas are interconnected entities, as exemplified by Kota Tua Donggala, which once served as a major maritime trade center in Central Sulawesi from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. The development of this area has left behind tangible heritage in the form of historic buildings that reflect a rich acculturation of local traditions and Dutch colonial influences. Over time, however, many of these structures have suffered damage due to functional changes, environmental factors, and a general lack of public awareness regarding the importance of preservation. This study aims to examine the existing condition of historic buildings in the Old Port area of Donggala and to apply appropriate conservation principles to ensure the sustainability of the site. The research methods include field surveys, physical documentation, and damage analysis based on environmental, structural, and socio-cultural aspects. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of contextual and participatory conservation strategies, while also strengthening the cultural identity of the area through the preservation of its architectural heritage.

Keywords: conservation, historic buildings, Kota Tua Donggala

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I. INTRODUCTION

Cities and ports are inseparable entities that have historically developed in a mutually dependent relationship. Any discussion of Donggala would be incomplete without addressing the role of its port, and vice versa. As a port city, Donggala once emerged as a strategic trading center and played a significant role within regional maritime networks. From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, Donggala became an important node in the Indonesian archipelago's trading system (Abubakar, 2022).

As a former maritime trade center that flourished during the Dutch colonial period (1905–1942), the area inherited substantial physical transformations, including buildings, infrastructure, and spatial configurations that have significantly shaped its cultural landscape (Weber, 2020). Donggala Old Town contains numerous historic buildings that illustrate the acculturation between local cultural traditions and Dutch colonial influences. Evidence of this historical significance can be found in the *Memorie van Overgave* (M.v.O.), an archival document preserved at the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta, which serves as a primary source documenting the Dutch colonial administration between 1902 and 1942. Preliminary studies indicate that Donggala possesses invaluable cultural assets that deserve serious attention within conservation and preservation efforts (Mansur, 2006).

The historical traces of the Old Port area remain visible today through both scholarly publications and surviving historic structures that stand as tangible witnesses to the passage of time. Notable examples include the Aduma Niaga Building (formerly P.N. Budi Bhakti), the former Teng Hien Store, the Cylindrical Copra Warehouse (Coprafonds), and several other buildings that continue to embody the historical identity of the area.

Over time, many historic structures within the district have deteriorated due to natural factors, changes in function, and limited public awareness of heritage preservation. This phenomenon presents considerable challenges for conservation efforts aimed at protecting, developing, and utilizing cultural heritage buildings in accordance with existing legislation and governmental regulations.

In practice, conservation initiatives frequently encounter obstacles that vary according to local conditions and the perceptions of decision-makers involved in urban development. One major challenge is the tendency among planners and developers to perceive historic buildings as impediments to economic progress. Consequently, many heritage structures are neglected and allowed to deteriorate. These buildings are often considered obsolete and incapable of meeting contemporary functional requirements. As a result, some cities have chosen to demolish historic districts and replace them with new developments perceived as more

economically beneficial. However, such actions often sacrifice the unique identity of the area. Therefore, effective conservation of historic buildings and heritage districts requires appropriate strategies and clear guidelines regarding suitable preservation approaches.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to examine the implementation of conservation measures for historic buildings within the Old Port area of Donggala Old Town and to formulate strategic concepts for preservation efforts that support the long-term sustainability of the district.

The specific objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the existing conditions of historic buildings through physical documentation and field observation.
2. To assess the forms of deterioration affecting the buildings from environmental, structural, and anthropogenic perspectives.
3. To evaluate conservation principles encompassing the protection, development, and utilization of historic buildings in accordance with prevailing legal frameworks.
4. To contribute theoretically to the advancement of architectural conservation studies and practically to the formulation of heritage preservation policies.
5. To enhance public awareness regarding the importance of safeguarding local cultural identity through the preservation of historic buildings.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study method focused on the Old Port area of Donggala Old Town. The approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the existing conditions of historic buildings and to identify conservation measures that are relevant to the local context. The study was conducted through two primary stages. The first involved exploring the physical conditions of historic buildings through direct field observation. The second stage focused on evaluating the findings and formulating preservation strategies based on the historical and cultural significance of the area. Data collection was carried out using multiple techniques, including:

1. Literature Review Secondary data were collected from books, academic journals, historical records, and conservation-related regulations concerning the history and development of Donggala.
2. Field Observation Visual documentation, including photographs and site inspections, was undertaken to identify the physical conditions and deterioration patterns of the buildings.
3. In-depth Interviews Interviews were conducted with local community leaders, building owners, local historians, cultural activists, and representatives of relevant government institutions to obtain contextual insights regarding conservation issues and preservation efforts.

This methodological framework enables a comprehensive, contextual, and participatory analysis of the challenges and opportunities associated with the conservation of historic buildings within the study area.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Definition of Historic Building Conservation

The term conservation serves as an umbrella concept encompassing all activities related to heritage preservation. According to the Indonesian Dictionary (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia), preservation refers to the process, method, or action undertaken to maintain and protect an object from deterioration, extinction, or loss. Preservation also involves the prudent management of cultural and environmental resources to ensure their sustainability while maintaining and enhancing their quality, value, and diversity.

Contemporary conservation approaches extend beyond the mere maintenance and protection of heritage assets. Conservation now includes the provision of new and relevant functions that respond to community needs while revitalizing the surrounding area. According to Pamungkas (1998), conservation efforts should be integrated into comprehensive planning and design processes, supported by implementation strategies and economic development frameworks. The ultimate objective is to create high-quality environments that retain their distinctive historical character.

Within this context, architects play a crucial role in determining appropriate adaptive functions for historic buildings, as not all contemporary uses are compatible with heritage values. Conservation is therefore not solely concerned with preserving the past but also with creating a cultural legacy for future generations.

In architectural practice, conservation is defined as the management of a place in a manner that preserves its cultural significance and authenticity. Several scholars and conservation charters have provided definitions of conservation:

- The Burra Charter (1981) defines conservation as all processes undertaken to maintain the cultural significance of a place.
- Danisworo (1990) describes conservation as efforts to preserve places of significance, including buildings and environments possessing historical, architectural, cultural, or traditional values.
- From an urban design perspective, Shirvani (1984) argues that conservation should protect the urban environment and spatial settings in which historic buildings and activities exist.
- Environmental science views conservation as the careful protection and management of environmental and natural resources.

These perspectives collectively indicate that conservation involves protecting buildings and their surrounding environments from deterioration while maintaining their historical, architectural, aesthetic, scientific, and social values for future generations. Conservation activities encompass maintenance, restoration, adaptation, and the management of compatible new uses.

In Indonesia, conservation principles are formally regulated under Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage, which defines preservation as a dynamic effort to maintain the existence and significance of cultural heritage through protection, development, and utilization. These principles are further elaborated in Ministerial Regulation of Public Works and Housing (PUPR) No. 19 of 2021, which provides technical guidelines for the conservation of heritage buildings.

Accordingly, conservation can be understood as a comprehensive effort to safeguard historic buildings and their environments from physical and non-physical degradation while ensuring the continuity of their cultural significance.

4.2 Scope and Types of Conservation Activities

Initially, conservation was primarily associated with preserving museum collections and individual historic buildings. However, contemporary conservation practices encompass broader spatial scales. According to Shankland (cited in Bani, 2004), conservation may be applied to:

- Historic villages and small towns;
- Historic districts within larger cities;
- Entire historic cities; and
- Groups of historic buildings.

Within urban contexts, conservation objects may be categorized into three levels:

- Area Units, representing sub-regional conservation zones.
- Visual Units, including urban elements such as paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks.
- Physical Units, consisting of individual buildings, building groups, structures, and architectural ornaments.

Conservation activities can be classified into six categories based on the degree of intervention:

1. Conservation – Maintaining a building or site in a manner that preserves its cultural significance.
2. Preservation – Retaining existing materials and conditions while minimizing deterioration.
3. Restoration/Rehabilitation – Returning a building to an earlier state by reinstating missing elements and removing inappropriate alterations.
4. Reconstruction – Rebuilding a structure to its original form using either original or new materials.
5. Adaptation/Revitalization – Modifying a building to accommodate a compatible contemporary function.
6. Demolition – Removing structures that are beyond repair or pose significant safety risks.

These categories provide a framework for selecting appropriate conservation interventions based on the condition and significance of heritage buildings.

4.3 STUDY AREA: THE OLD PORT DISTRICT OF DONGGALA OLD TOWN

The Old Port District of Donggala Old Town is one of the most significant historic waterfront areas along Palu Bay in Central Sulawesi. The district reflects the historical identity of Donggala as a maritime trading city that flourished during the colonial era.

Historical records indicate that the area existed as early as the fourteenth century during the Banawa Kingdom. However, permanent port infrastructure was not developed until the late nineteenth century when the Dutch East Indies administration established modern port facilities to support regional trade networks (Abubakar, 2022).



Figure1: The Old Port in Donggala's Old Town

The district contains numerous colonial-era buildings that remain as physical evidence of Donggala's maritime and commercial history. These include warehouses, administrative offices, commercial buildings, and residential structures characterized by colonial architectural styles. Although many of these buildings have experienced deterioration, functional transformation, or abandonment, their historical and architectural significance remains substantial.



Figure1: A row of buildings still standing around the Old Port area of Donggala's Old Town.

The conservation potential of the area is considerable. Growing public awareness of cultural heritage preservation has created opportunities to transform the Old Port District into both a conservation zone and a heritage tourism destination. Through context-sensitive revitalization strategies that retain historical elements while improving accessibility and public amenities, the district can function as a productive cultural, social, and economic asset.

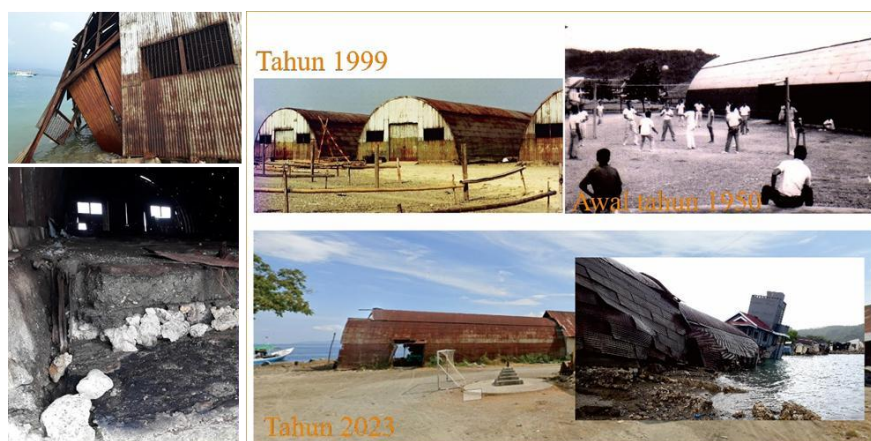


Figure1: Map of the Research Spatial Scope

Administratively, the study area is located within Banawa District, Donggala Regency, Central Sulawesi Province. The research focuses on five historic buildings representing different aspects of the area's cultural heritage:

1. Cylindrical Copra Warehouse (Coprifonds)

The Cylindrical Copra Warehouse is a large industrial building representing colonial-era agricultural infrastructure. Currently, the structure has suffered severe damage due to earthquake-induced land subsidence toward the coastline. Aging materials and prolonged neglect have further accelerated its deterioration.



2. Regional Copra Cooperative Headquarters (PKKD)

The PKKD building formerly served as the administrative center of the regional copra industry. Today, the structure has virtually disappeared due to advanced deterioration caused by aging, insufficient maintenance, and the absence of preservation measures.



3. Former Teng Hien Store

Originally constructed by the Dutch colonial government in the early twentieth century, this timber building was reconstructed in 1967. The structure currently suffers severe damage, particularly to the roof, following a major fire. Limited maintenance and preservation efforts have contributed to its declining condition.



4. Aduma Niaga Building (Former P.N. Budi Bhakti)



This colonial-era administrative building sustained severe structural damage during recent earthquakes, which destroyed portions of its façade. The impacts of aging and prolonged neglect have further worsened its condition.

5. Souraja Donggala



Souraja Donggala is a nineteenth-century stilt house officially designated as a Cultural Heritage Building in 2024. Despite this designation, the building remains in a state of severe deterioration due to inadequate maintenance and limited conservation funding.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Donggala Old Town possesses substantial historical significance as a former maritime trade center within the Indonesian archipelago. The Old Port District and its surrounding heritage buildings represent important evidence of the area's historical, architectural, and socio-cultural development. Analysis of the five case-study buildings reveals a consistent pattern of deterioration caused by a combination of natural disasters, aging, legal disputes, inadequate maintenance, and weak preservation policies.

1. Coprafonds Warehouse and PKKD Building

Both buildings have been abandoned due to the absence of functional use and unresolved ownership disputes involving private parties and cooperative institutions. The resulting legal uncertainty has hindered conservation efforts and accelerated physical deterioration. From a conservation perspective, adaptive reuse and revitalization strategies could provide viable solutions by introducing compatible new functions that support long-term sustainability.

2. Former Teng Hien Store

The building suffered severe fire damage and currently lacks a structured restoration or rehabilitation program. Given its historical significance, restoration combined with adaptive reuse should be considered to recover both its physical integrity and social relevance.

3. Aduma Niaga Building

The building experienced extensive earthquake damage but has yet to receive comprehensive restoration interventions. Immediate structural stabilization and rehabilitation measures are necessary to prevent further deterioration.

4. Souraja Donggala

Although officially designated as cultural heritage property, Souraja remains in poor condition due to limited financial support and insufficient preservation initiatives. This situation illustrates the gap between legal recognition and practical conservation implementation.

Beyond their physical significance, all five buildings possess strong cultural and symbolic value for the local community. However, the perception that historic buildings constitute obstacles to modern development remains a major challenge. Economic priorities often dominate urban planning agendas, resulting in the neglect of cultural heritage resources.

Effective conservation therefore requires an integrated approach based on the principles of protection, development, and utilization as stipulated by Indonesian cultural heritage legislation. Furthermore, sustainable

conservation depends on active collaboration among government agencies, property owners, architects, conservation specialists, and local communities.

The findings also indicate that conservation should not be limited to physical preservation alone. It must encompass the social, economic, and cultural values embedded within heritage structures. Consequently, conservation should be recognized as an integral component of sustainable urban development rather than as an impediment to modernization.

The revitalization of the Old Port District should therefore aim not only to preserve historic buildings but also to reactivate their cultural meaning and social functions as essential components of Donggala's urban identity.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the Old Port District of Donggala Old Town possesses significant potential as a cultural heritage landscape representing the history of maritime trade and the interaction between local traditions and Dutch colonial influences.

Nevertheless, the current condition of most historic buildings is characterized by severe deterioration resulting from a combination of aging, natural disasters, inadequate maintenance, and limited public awareness regarding heritage preservation. Conservation challenges are further intensified by the perception that historic buildings no longer serve contemporary development needs.

The conservation of the Old Port District requires more than technical interventions aimed at physical protection. It necessitates a strategic and collaborative framework involving local communities, government institutions, heritage professionals, and property owners. The principles of protection, development, and utilization should be implemented through participatory approaches supported by effective regulatory frameworks.

Ultimately, conservation should be understood not merely as the preservation of historic structures but as the revitalization of the cultural values, social functions, and collective identity embedded within them. The findings of this study provide a foundation for the formulation of more progressive and sustainable conservation policies that prioritize the preservation of local cultural heritage.

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