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Article Title

Sustainable Travel Experience: Integration of Indigenous Storytelling into Travel Patterns Design in Lae-Lae Island – Makassar City

Author(s)

Mia Rahayu*

Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, Indonesia // miarahayu@poltekiparmakassar.ac.id

*Corresponding Author

Andi Fatimah Maoudy

Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, Indonesia // maoudy@poltekiparmakassar.ac.id

Indra Gunawan

Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, Indonesia // indramiraldy@poltekiparmakassar.ac.id

Nur Farah Fajriaty Muchlis

Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, Indonesia // nurfarahf@poltekiparmakassar.ac.id

Renold Renold

Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, Indonesia // obuscuslan@gmail.com

Atriana Djabbar

Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar, Indonesia // atrianadj@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Amid the global shift toward more authentic and meaningful tourism, many small island destinations, such as Lae-lae Island in Makassar, face the challenge of brief, superficial visits despite their wealth of intangible cultural heritage. This research aims to develop a systematic travel patterns design model grounded in indigenous storytelling to enrich the visitor experience. Employing a qualitative case study design that involved in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, this study first identifies four main narrative repositories on Lae-lae Island. These repositories encompass collective memory, myths of sustenance, maritime spirituality, and the symbolism of communal protection. Based on an analysis of these narrative assets and the existing tourism context, this research generates a concrete intervention model: the Narrative Travel Pattern. This model strategically adapts the dominant stopover travel pattern, transforming it into a curated linear route that connects the primary narrative sites. Key findings indicate that integrating indigenous storytelling into spatial movement not only deepens the quality of the tourist experience within a limited visitation time but also opens a space for empowering the local community as guardians and interpreters of their own culture. The study recommends developing interpretive materials and training local guides as crucial steps in implementation. Ultimately, this model contributes to the cultural tourism literature by offering an applicable framework for transforming intangible heritage into an authentic and sustainable tourism asset.

Keywords: Indigenous Storytelling; Lae-Lae Island; Sustainable Tourism; Tourist Experience; Travel Patterns Design.

INTRODUCTION

The global tourism paradigm is undergoing a fundamental shift. Modern travelers no longer seek mere destinations for relaxation but yearn for deeper, more authentic, and meaningful travel experiences (Richards, 2018). This phenomenon is driving an evolution from passive mass tourism toward more sustainable and participatory models. Concepts such as slow tourism are gaining prominence, encouraging travelers to engage mindfully with local environments, cultures, and communities (Krešić & Gjurašić, 2022). This shift demands that destination planners innovate, moving beyond selling physical attractions to designing experiences that resonate with travelers' emotional and intellectual aspects.

In line with this trend, culture-based tourism is undergoing a significant transformation, which experts have termed the creative turn in tourism studies (Richards, 2011). The industry's focus is gradually shifting from tangible cultural heritage, such as monuments and artifacts, to intangible cultural heritage (Akhirun & Septiady, 2022). This intangible heritage encompasses traditions, rituals, local knowledge, and, notably, the art of storytelling. Travelers are no longer content with merely observing; they desire to engage, learn, and feel the pulse of a destination's daily life (Richards & Wilson, 2006). In this context, creativity is not exclusive to artists or industry practitioners; it also involves the creative potential of travelers themselves to co-create unique and personal experiences.

Among the various elements of intangible culture, indigenous storytelling emerges as one of the most powerful tools for creating authentic, emotionally fulfilling

tourism experiences (Shilaja, 2017). Narratives passed down through generations serve not only as a medium for transferring historical or mythological information but also as a bridge connecting travelers to the soul of a place. This approach, now popularly known as storynomics tourism, views indigenous storytelling not as a byproduct but as a strategic asset that can significantly enhance a destination's appeal (Utama & Thennos, 2025). Through powerful narratives, an ordinary location can be transformed into a meaningful space, and a journey can be elevated into an unforgettable cultural pilgrimage (Dewiyanti et al., 2023).

The Indonesian context, with its extraordinary wealth of oral traditions, offers fertile ground for developing tourism grounded in indigenous storytelling. Various case studies demonstrate the significant potential of this approach. Examples range from utilizing legends to guide tours in West Papua (Utama & Thennos, 2025), training local guides in storytelling to bring village histories to life in Bali (Kadek et al., 2024), to designing educational walking tours (edu-walking tours) based on historical narratives in Kudus (Pitaloka et al., 2024). These initiatives demonstrate that when managed effectively, indigenous storytelling-based tourism not only enriches the traveler's experience but also serves as a vital tool for cultural preservation and local economic empowerment. It aligns with the perspective of Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) on the importance of indigenous perspectives in the management of cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, this significant potential often remains underdeveloped, as is the case on Lae-lae Island, a small island off the coast of Makassar City. The island is a living repository of diverse local narratives, from the unique origin of its name and legends of a sacred tomb to World War II-era historical remnants, such as a Japanese bunker. All these narratives constitute the community's cultural identity. However, this narrative wealth remains largely untapped and has not been integrated into existing tourism offerings (Khrisnamurti et al., 2016). Consequently, tourist visits to Lae-lae Island tend to be brief and superficial. Travelers typically focus on beach activities without engaging with the deeper cultural layers that define the island's unique character.

This situation presents a pressing twofold problem. On one hand, there is a highly valuable yet underutilized intangible cultural asset. On the other hand, haphazard development without a deep cultural understanding poses a high risk of commodification, in which sacred stories are simplified or distorted to meet market expectations (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). It leads to a significant research gap. While numerous studies have affirmed the importance of stories in tourism, very few have offered a systematic model for integrating these narratives into the design of travelers' physical movement, or travel pattern design, particularly in the context of a vulnerable small island destination like Lae-lae.

Therefore, the primary novelty of this research lies in its approach to treating indigenous storytelling not merely as attraction content but as a fundamental design tool for structuring visitors' spatial and temporal experiences. This study seeks to bridge the gap between cultural content studies (what the stories are) and tourist movement analysis (how tourists move), a field whose framework was pioneered by [Lew and McKercher \(2006\)](#). By mapping narratives onto physical routes, this research offers a concrete solution for transforming brief, transactional visits into coherent, profound, and ultimately more sustainable narrative journeys.

Based on this background, this study aims to develop a model for travel pattern design grounded in indigenous storytelling that can be implemented on Lae-lae Island. Practically, the research is expected to provide a blueprint for local stakeholders—from local government and tourism operators to the community—to develop authentic, competitive, and sustainable tourism products. Academically, this study seeks to enrich the cultural tourism literature by offering a practical model that integrates intangible heritage into destination spatial planning. Ultimately, the proposed model is expected not only to enhance the quality of the tourist experience but also to contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and the strengthening of the Lae-lae Island community's identity.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to provide in-depth, comprehensive answers to the research questions. This approach was selected for its superior ability to capture the complexity, meanings, and sociocultural context of the phenomenon under investigation: the integration of indigenous storytelling into tourism experience design ([Creswell, 2013](#)). The objective of this research is not statistical generalization. Instead, it aims to achieve a rich understanding of how local narratives can serve as a foundation for sustainable tourism on Lae-lae Island, Makassar City. This location was chosen as the case because it represents the characteristics of a small island destination rich in intangible heritage, yet facing challenges in tourism development.

To achieve data depth, this study implemented a methodological triangulation strategy, combining three primary data collection techniques. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with five purposively selected key informants. These informants included residents, local tourism business operators, youth representatives, tourists, and relevant government officials. Second, participatory observation was conducted over two weeks, totaling 40 observation hours. The researcher engaged directly in the community's daily activities and followed the flow of tourist movement to understand how local narratives manifest in everyday practices and how interactions between tourists and residents occur. Third, a document analysis was conducted of relevant materials, including the Makassar City

Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (*Rencana Induk Pembangunan Pariwisata Daerah* or RIPPARDA), local cultural archives, and media publications on tourism on the island.

Subsequently, all collected qualitative data—comprising interview transcripts, observational field notes, and document summaries—were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis. This analytical process adopted the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). The framework includes: (1) familiarization with and comprehensive reading of the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for potential themes from the codes, (4) reviewing and remapping themes, (5) defining and naming the final themes, and (6) producing the analytical report. This technique was chosen to identify dominant narrative patterns, cultural values, and community perceptions. The results then served as the basis for formulating an integration model of indigenous storytelling into travel pattern design, which will be presented in the results and discussion chapter.

Throughout the research process, ethical principles were strictly upheld to ensure data integrity and protect participants. Before each interview and observation, informed consent was obtained both orally and in writing. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants' identities were fully guaranteed in the data presentation. To enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from different types of informants. Additionally, member checking was conducted, during which some initial findings were reconfirmed with key participants. This rigorous and ethical methodological approach ensures that the resulting tourism development model is genuinely rooted in the voices and worldview of the Lae-lae Island community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Unearthing the Narrative Repository of Lae-lae Island: Intangible Cultural Assets

Field research findings identify Lae-lae Island as a rich repository of narratives. There, indigenous storytelling not only serves as a memory of the past but is also alive and integrated into the community's physical landscape and social practices. These intangible cultural assets constitute the fundamental cultural capital that serves as the primary foundation for designing an experience-based tourism model. The following section details the four core narratives that were successfully unearthed. Each narrative is attached to specific sites on the island and represents different layers of meaning, ranging from collective memory and survival myths to maritime spirituality and the symbolism of communal protection.

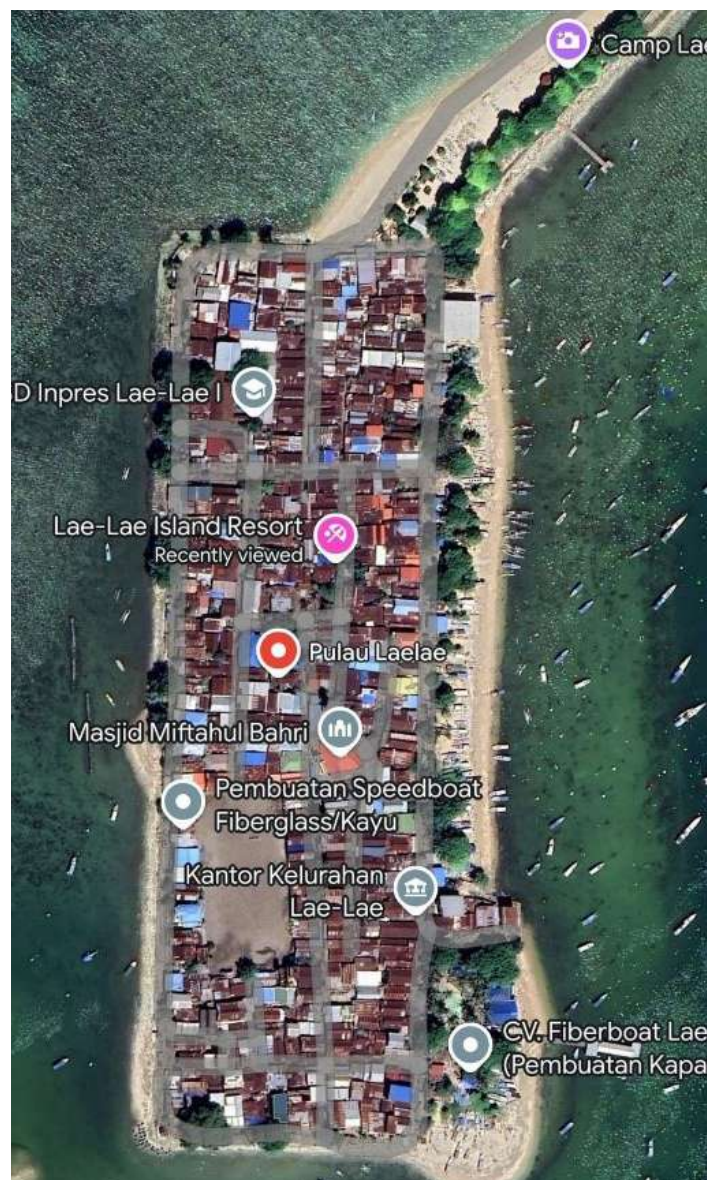


Figure 1. Location Map or Aerial Image of Lae-lae Island Showing its Position off the Coast of Makassar City.

1. Narratives of Resistance and Collective Memory: The Japanese Bunkers

Among the various historical sites on Lae-lae Island, three bunkers from the Japanese occupation period are the most prominent physical artifacts, laden with layers of meaning. Field observations indicate that the condition and location of the bunkers vary. The first bunker, located on the southern side of the island, sits directly in a resident's front yard facing the sea. Its structure, resembling an inverted 'Z' and approximately five meters long, is now integrated into the residents' domestic landscape. The second bunker, situated on the western side, has a different shape, resembling steps, and is longer. Meanwhile, the third bunker, known as the main one, is shrouded in mystery. Oral narratives claim the existence of an underwater tunnel connecting it to Fort Rotterdam on the Makassar mainland, although its location has yet to be confirmed.



Figure 2. One of the Japanese Bunkers on the Southern Side of Lae-lae Island is a Physical Artifact Serving as a Vessel for the Community's Collective Memory.

The narrative layer enveloping these bunkers extends far beyond a mere historical record of their function as defensive fortifications. For the Lae-lae community, these bunkers have transformed into sites of memory (*lieu de mémoire*). This concept refers to points where a community's collective memory resides. These bunkers serve as a stage for oral stories about the suffering, resistance, and endurance of their ancestors during the war. Their silent yet sturdy presence serves as a constant reminder of the history that has shaped the island community's character. More than just old piles of concrete, these bunkers are unofficial monuments that continuously 'speak' to new generations about their origins and struggles.

This profound meaning was reaffirmed through an interview with one of the island's traditional elders. He conveyed his perspective with deep sentiment, which also voiced the communal feeling toward this heritage:

"For us, the people of Lae-lae, the bunkers are not just leftover stones from the war. They are tangible proof of how our grandparents survived through hardship. Every time we see them, we are reminded not to forget where we come from. It is our heritage, not merely a tourist object."

This quote clearly demonstrates that the bunkers serve a vital sociocultural function. They are an anchor of identity connecting the past to the present. However, the initial analysis identified a disconnect between this high cultural value and the site's physical conditions. Observations revealed that cleanliness around the bunker areas remains a primary challenge, potentially diminishing the experiential value for tourists. These bunkers represent both a significant potential and a tangible challenge. The challenge lies in transforming a sacred 'site of memory' for the community into a meaningful, well-maintained 'tourism site' without diminishing its inherent sanctity.

2. Myth of Sustenance: The Old Dutch Well

Shifting from the historical narrative of war, another fundamental narrative that shapes the worldview of the Lae-lae community centers on

an old well from the Dutch colonial era. Physically, the well appears modest, with a diameter of approximately 180 centimeters and a wellhead rising 70 centimeters above the ground. For the residents, however, this well is not merely infrastructure. It is a mythological artifact that marks the island's genesis of civilization. A firmly held belief asserts that this well has existed for decades and marks the very beginning of community life on Lae-lae.



Figure 3. The Old Dutch Well, Still Functioning as a Center for Social Activity and a Symbol of Sustenance for the Lae-lae Community.

The well's primary allure lies in the 'miraculous' narrative attached to it. The community believes that its water possesses qualities that defy the natural logic of a small island surrounded by the sea. Its water is fresh, it never runs dry even during long droughts, and it has never been contaminated. This myth effectively transforms the well from a mere water source into a symbol of resilience, divine blessing, and the guaranteed continuity of life from a higher power or ancestral spirits. This narrative serves as an ontological foundation for the community, affirming that their survival on the island is not coincidental but has been guaranteed and blessed from the beginning.

The well's social function in daily life provides tangible evidence of how this myth is lived and practiced. Participatory observation revealed that the well is one of the most vital public spaces on Lae-lae Island. It is a dynamic arena for social interaction, a place where residents gather, exchange stories, and strengthen communal bonds. Furthermore, an interesting social custom governs its use. The well is divided into two sides: the left is designated for men and the right for women. This practice, beyond being a mechanism for managing a shared water resource, also subtly reflects and reproduces the community's social structure and gender norms.

From a tourism perspective, the Old Well's narrative offers exceptional potential for development as an educational attraction focused on ecological and social wisdom. This indigenous storytelling is not just about a 'magic

well.' It is a story of how an island community has historically managed its limited water resources, built a belief system to protect that resource, and how its daily social practices reflect values of sustainability. Thus, the well can become a powerful stop on a narrative tourist route. There, visitors would not only see an object but also learn about the philosophy of life, resilience, and the harmony between humans and nature that lies at the core of the Lae-lae community's identity.

3. Maritime Spirituality: The Legend of the Sacred Tombs

The core of the Lae-lae community's cosmology, which fundamentally shapes their relationship with the sea, manifests in two old tomb complexes considered sacred. Located at the island's extremities, these tombs' geographical positioning symbolically establishes them as 'guardians' or 'spiritual gateways' between the land and the sea. Their status as sacred sites indicates that these are not merely ancestral resting places. They are sacred spaces where the boundary between the human and the supernatural worlds becomes thin. These spaces are central to ritual practices that govern nearly every aspect of the community's maritime life, which is primarily fishing.



Figure 4. One of the Sacred Tombs at the Island's Edge, a Ritual Center Reflecting the Maritime Spirituality of the Lae-lae Community.

The most prominent ritual still practiced today is the tradition of 'asking for permission' before going to sea or undertaking long journeys off the island. This ritual is more than a mere request for a blessing. It is a form of communication and negotiation with the ancestral spirits believed to be the guardians of the sea. The procession involves distinctive offerings, such as sticky rice with roasted coconut (*kaddo minyak*) and fruits. These offerings are blessed with prayers before being placed at the tomb site. It serves as a reflection of a reciprocal relationship—a socio-spiritual contract in which the community offers gifts as a sign of respect. In return, they hope to receive protection, safety, and an abundant catch from the sea.

A senior fisher and local community leader explained the urgency behind this ritual. His explanation provides a window into the underlying worldview:

“It is our code of conduct toward our predecessors, to the ones who ‘own’ this sea. The sea has its own rules; it is not just a place to find fish. If we are not polite, if we do not ‘ask permission’ first, we could meet with disaster on our journey. This is not a game; it is how we ensure our safety and maintain a good relationship with nature.”

Analysis of this narrative and its associated ritual practices reveals that the Sacred Tombs are the most authentic spiritual capital and intangible heritage asset on Lae-lae Island. Its authenticity lies in the fact that this ritual is not a performance but a living, functional, and essential cultural practice for the community’s survival and psychological well-being. Herein, however, lies its greatest paradox in the context of tourism. The very authenticity that constitutes its main attraction is also its greatest vulnerability to commodification. Transforming a sacred ritual into a tourist spectacle could instantly destroy its sanctity and delegitimize its spiritual meaning for the community. Therefore, integrating this narrative into a tourism experience demands an exceptionally careful and respectful approach, one that focuses on interpreting the indigenous storytelling behind it, rather than on re-enacting the ritual itself.

4. Symbol of Community Protection: The Tale of the Ancient Stone

Completing the narrative landscape of Lae-lae Island is an ancient stone of unique shape, located near one of the sacred tomb sites. Unlike the other narratives tied to history (the bunkers) or vital functions (the well and tombs), the narrative of this ancient stone is more subtle and rooted in an animistic cosmology. Some community members believe the stone is a kind of ‘talisman’ or ‘guardian’ of the island that has existed since the time of the first inhabitants. Its existence is not the result of a recorded historical event. It is part of ancestral knowledge, passed down as a vague yet persistent belief.



Figure 5. The Ancient Stone, Believed to be a Symbol of Community Protection, is Located Near Other Sacred Areas.

The core of this narrative is the belief that the stone possesses a protective power. This power is not specifically defined but is generally understood as a ward against misfortune, both supernatural and physical. Interestingly, one aspect of protection mentioned by an informant is its ability to shield the island from environmental damage. This belief indicates a close link between spirituality and ecological awareness in the community's worldview. In their belief system, maintaining a good relationship with sacred entities like this stone is tantamount to preserving the balance and health of the island's entire environment.

Although this narrative is not accompanied by the structured rituals of the sacred tombs, the stone's presence is still revered. A resident articulated this with simple yet firm conviction:

"That stone has truly been there for a very long time. Our elders said that as long as the stone remains, this island will remain safe. It is like our guardian from bad things."

From a tourism development perspective, the narrative of the Ancient Stone offers a different kind of potential. While other narratives can be told explicitly, this one is better suited for integration as an element that builds a 'sense of place'. Its silent, enigmatic presence can create an atmosphere of mystery and antiquity, inviting tourists to reflect and feel the location's spiritual aura. Rather than being a primary attraction that is explained in detail, the stone can serve as a contemplative point along a travel route. It becomes a pause that allows visitors to connect with a deeper layer of belief and to sense how the physical and spiritual landscapes of Lae-lae Island are intertwined.

B. Analysis of the Existing Tourism Context: Opportunities and Challenges

After identifying the wealth of narrative assets, the next step is to map the existing tourism conditions on Lae-lae Island. The objective is to understand the opportunities and challenges in integrating these narratives. This analysis utilizes the established tourism product framework, which examines the key elements of attractions, accessibility, amenities, and activities (Cooper et al., 1993; Page, 1994; Buhalis, 2000; Middleton & Clarke, 2001; Joppe, 2002). This framework allows for a systematic dissection of what the island currently offers and where the gaps between potential and reality lie.

From Attractions' perspective, Lae-lae Island currently relies heavily on its generic natural draws, such as sunset views and beach activities. This is its primary challenge. The very attractions that serve as its unique selling points—namely, the repository of stories detailed in the previous section—have not yet been packaged into tourism products. The greatest opportunity lies in making a fundamental shift from selling 'scenery' to selling a 'worldview' through its narratives. The main attraction is not the bunker as a pile of concrete, but the story of resistance

behind it. It is not the well as a hole in the ground, but the myth of sustenance that accompanies it.

In terms of Accessibility, Lae-lae Island possesses a significant competitive advantage due to its proximity to the center of Makassar City. The travel time is only 10 to 15 minutes by traditional boat or speedboat from the Kayu Bangkoa Pier. However, this ease of access is also a double-edged sword. It encourages very short visitation patterns, where tourists arrive and depart quickly without feeling the need to stay longer and explore more deeply. Meanwhile, internal accessibility on the island is adequate, with established footpaths. However, there is no system of signage or interpretation to guide tourists to the narrative sites scattered across various locations.



Figure 6. The Kayu Bangkoa Pier, the Main Access Point for Tourists and the Community to Lae-lae Island.

Next, regarding Amenities, the facilities available on the island are organic and managed by the local community. The presence of simple homestays, gazebos, public toilets, a prayer room (*musala*), and small stalls selling traditional snacks presents an opportunity. It can create an authentic experience and ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are felt directly by residents. The challenges, however, lie in standardization and capacity. Facilities for marine activities, such as float rentals, exist, but for more specialized activities, such as snorkeling or diving, management is not well organized. Most importantly, the key amenity for indigenous storytelling-based tourism—namely, local tour guides trained in the art of storytelling—is an existing resource whose capacity has not yet been formally developed.

Finally, in terms of Activities, the currently dominant tourist pursuits are generic beach activities common to any coastal destination. The opportunity for product innovation lies in creating new activities that are directly linked to the local narratives. Instead of just swimming, tourists could be invited on a 'historical pilgrimage tour' to the bunkers, a 'local wisdom tour' to the old well, or even a simple workshop to learn local handicrafts while listening to indigenous storytelling. The main challenge is the absence of any entity to design, package, and offer these structured, narrative-based activity packages to the market.

C. Designing the Narrative Travel Pattern: An Integration Model for Lae-lae Island

The synthesis of the narrative asset identification (Subchapter A) and the tourism context analysis (Subchapter B) leads to the formulation of an intervention model. This model involves redesigning tourist travel patterns on Lae-lae Island by using indigenous storytelling as its primary framework. This step aims to address the primary challenges identified: short visit durations and superficial experiences. It does so by transforming tourists' spatial movement into a coherent, meaningful narrative journey. The proposed model consciously selects and adapts a theoretical framework of tourist movement to suit the unique conditions of Lae-lae Island.

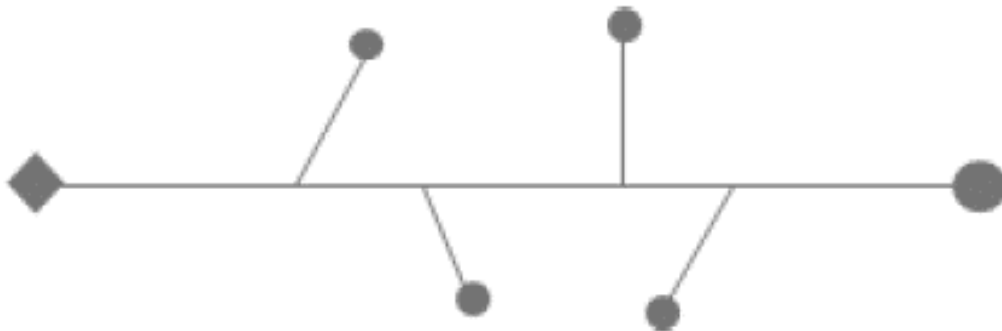


Figure 7. The Stopover Travel Pattern (Lew & McKercher, 2006).

Based on the theoretical framework presented by [Lew and McKercher \(2006\)](#), travel patterns can be divided into six categories: single point, base site, stopover, chaining loop, destination region loop, and complex neighborhood. The analysis of on-site conditions indicates that the most suitable adaptation model for Lae-lae Island is the stopover travel pattern. This decision is based on three primary, mutually reinforcing justifications. First, this pattern already reflects the dominant behavior of tourists who make brief visits. Second, and most importantly, it aligns perfectly with the island's elongated geography, where the main narrative sites are distributed along its western and eastern edges. Third, the presence of two piers in different locations allows for the design of an efficient linear route. Tourists can enter through one gate and exit through another without backtracking. Therefore, rather than attempting to change this pattern drastically, the proposed model seeks to enrich and maximize the experience within the existing spatial and temporal framework. The goal is to transform a 'stopover' from a mere physical transit into a profound 'narrative stop'.

The proposed Narrative Travel Pattern model is as follows. The journey begins at the main entry point (Kayu Bangkoa Pier) and follows a curated linear route that connects the primary narrative sites. This route is designed to be traversed on foot, utilizing the existing footpaths. The First Stop is the Japanese Bunkers, where a trained local guide will convey the 'Narrative of Resistance and Collective

Memory'. The Second Stop is the Old Dutch Well, where visitors are introduced to the 'Myth of Sustenance' and the community's ecological wisdom. The Third Stop leads to one of the Sacred Tombs, where the guide carefully interprets the story of 'Maritime Spirituality' without disturbing the site's sanctity. The journey concludes near the Fourth Stop, the Ancient Stone, which serves as a contemplative point for experiencing the 'Symbol of Community Protection'.

The implementation of this model fundamentally changes Lae-lae Island's tourism value proposition. It transforms the product from one based on 'space' (selling the beauty of the beach) to one based on 'place' (selling the meaning embedded in that space). The role of the local tour guide becomes absolutely central. Their position shifts from mere wayfinder to master storyteller (griot), serving as a bridge between the tourist and the island's soul. Thus, this integration model designs not only the movement of tourists but also a structured emotional and intellectual experience. Ultimately, its purpose is to leave a lasting impression and significantly increase tourist satisfaction, even within a short visit.

D. Implications and Academic Dialogue: Situating the Lae-lae Model in the Context of Cultural Tourism

The narrative travel model proposed for Lae-lae Island not only serves as a practical solution for destination development but also helps shape the island's identity. It also opens the door to a broader academic dialogue about its significance. By placing these findings in conversation with existing literature, we can more deeply understand their theoretical and practical implications. This discussion focuses on four main themes: the model's ability to create authentic experiences, the dynamic of community empowerment versus the risk of commodification, its contribution to sustainable tourism on small islands, and methodological reflections for future research.

From the tourist's perspective, this model directly addresses the global trend of seeking authentic and meaningful experiences (Richards, 2018). By structuring a short visit around a coherent flow of indigenous storytelling, the model transforms what could be a superficial tour into an emotionally and intellectually profound journey. It aligns with the findings of Zhang and Walsh (2021), who demonstrated that a search for enriching experiences often mediates cultural tourists' motivations. The quality of this experience, particularly the narrative delivery by tour guides, becomes a crucial factor that positively influences overall tourist satisfaction, a relationship also affirmed by Permana et al. (2024). Furthermore, by centering on local wisdom, the model is highly relevant for meeting the needs of specific tourist segments, such as elderly travelers, who have been shown to greatly appreciate and derive emotional and health benefits from interactions with local culture (Angin et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this model positions the community as an active subject in tourism, a critical step toward empowerment. By casting local elders and youth as storytellers, the model gives them a central role as guardians and interpreters of their own culture. This approach far exceeds passive participation models, in which the community merely receives economic benefits without being involved in decision-making, as observed by [Su and Wall \(2014\)](#) at the Mutianyu Great Wall. However, this empowerment must be balanced with vigilance against the risk of commodification ([Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009](#)). The key to mitigating this risk lies in comprehensive training for local guides. Such training should cover not only storytelling techniques but also the ethics of cultural heritage interpretation. Similar successful training initiatives in Bali ([Kadek et al., 2024](#)) and Kudus ([Pitaloka et al., 2024](#)) show that building local capacity is a crucial investment to ensure narratives are conveyed authentically and respectfully.

In a broader context, this narrative-based tourism approach offers a development model particularly well-suited for vulnerable small island destinations. By shifting the focus from potentially exploitative nature-based attractions to intangible heritage, the model can reduce pressure on the coastal ecosystem. It offers a potential solution to avoid the negative environmental impacts observed in other popular island destinations in Indonesia, such as Tidung Island ([Khrisnamurti et al., 2016](#)). This model is a tangible implementation of the storynomics tourism concept, which has proven effective in enhancing destination competitiveness through cultural capital, as shown in a case study in West Papua ([Utama & Thennos, 2025](#)). Conceptually, although visits to Lae-lae are brief, the model adopts the principles of slow tourism by emphasizing the depth and quality of interaction rather than the quantity of attractions visited ([Krešić & Gjurašić, 2022](#)).

Finally, a methodological reflection indicates that the qualitative approach used in this study was essential for unearthing the depth of meaning within the narratives and the sociocultural context of Lae-lae Island. However, the resulting travel pattern model is conceptual. Future research could further validate and refine this model through a mixed-methods approach, using tracking technologies such as GPS to map tourists' actual movements before and after the implementation of the narrative route. It would allow researchers to quantitatively measure changes in behavior, dwell time at each point, and the effectiveness of the route design. This approach, as outlined by [Shoval and Isaacson \(2007\)](#), would provide robust empirical evidence to complement the qualitative understanding established in this study. It would also pave the way for more robust cross-destination comparisons.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that this study has successfully formulated a systematic, narrative-based travel patterns design model for Lae-lae Island. This model effectively integrates four primary narrative assets—the story of resistance (bunkers), the myth of sustenance (well), maritime spirituality (tombs), and the symbolism of protection (stone)—into a stopover travel pattern framework. This pattern proves to be geographically and behaviorally suitable for the destination’s characteristics. By transforming typically superficial, short visits into a structured and coherent cultural journey, the model directly addresses the challenges of the existing tourism context. It also offers a concrete solution for maximizing the potential of the island’s intangible cultural heritage.

To translate this conceptual model into a sustainable reality, several practical recommendations must be considered. Synergistic collaboration among local government, community leaders, and local tourism operators is required to develop interpretive materials, such as information panels or digital guides, which enrich the experience at each narrative stop. However, the most crucial investment is in human resource development through a training program for local tour guides. This training must focus not only on engaging storytelling techniques but also on the ethics of cultural heritage interpretation. The goal is to ensure narratives are conveyed authentically and respectfully, thereby empowering the community as guardians of their own indigenous storytelling.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations that present opportunities for future academic investigation. The qualitative, single-case study nature of this research means that the proposed model, while contextually rich, requires further validation. Future research is strongly encouraged to adopt a mixed-methods approach. This approach could combine qualitative insights with quantitative analysis of tourist behavior to empirically measure the model’s implementation impact. Furthermore, conducting comparative studies in other small island destinations with different cultural contexts would be highly valuable. Such studies could test the transferability and refine the design principles of indigenous storytelling-based travel on a broader scale.

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