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## EXPLORING DISTINCTIVENESS IN RELIGIOUS TOURISM THROUGH LANDMARK: A STUDY OF PLACE IDENTITY IN LANGKAT, NORTH SUMATERA

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### ABSTRACT

A place can be easily recognized by the presence of distinctive landmarks. The image of a place can be seen in the presence of landmarks. Religious tourism destinations can become landmarks if there are peculiarities in the destination, especially having unique religious buildings, attractive visuals, easy to see, easy to identify, contrasting with the environment, and easy to access by tourists. This study aims to examine these four landmark elements in religious tourism in the Langkat regency. This study aims to examine four elements of landmarks in religious tourism in the Langkat Regency. This research uses mixed- methods by conducting observations to collect qualitative data and conducting interviews and distributing questionnaires to collect quantitative data. The results showed that religious tourism as a landmark that is easy to see, easy to identify, contrasts with the environment, and easy to reach in Langkat Regency can give a good impression to the local community.

**KEYWORDS:** landmark, religious tourism.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The arrival of tourists benefits the region and the local community because tourists bring economic benefits to the local community and the tourism area so that tourism growth can be in line with economic growth and can increase the value of the city [1]. The experts classified various types of tourism i.e., sustainable tourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, pilgrimage/religious tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, wellness tourism, business tourism, heritage tourism, maritime tourism, nature tourism, agro-tourism, and rush tourism [2][3][4]. Religious tourism is not only for religious activities, but can also be carried out to find out the history and see the architecture of the religious destination [5]. Religious tourism includes visits to religious centers such as Muslims visiting mosques, Christians to churches, Hindus to temples, Buddhists to the vihara, Konghucu to Klenteng, and others [6].

Tourists have many choices of tourist destinations because of the diversity of tourist destinations, so the tourism area must have a distinctiveness that can show the place's identity and can compete with other tourist destinations. The object differences in each tourist destination can show the distinctiveness of tourist destinations [7]. Landmark is part of the distinctiveness of tourist destinations [7][8][9]. A place that is easy to see, easy to recognize, contrasts with the environment, and is easily accessible can be a landmark [9].

The diversity of religions and beliefs held by the local people of Langkat Regency makes the area has the potential as a religious tourism destination. Religious buildings that have historical values and apply local culture can make religious tourism destinations more unique and can become landmarks in the area. Therefore, this study aims to examine four elements of landmarks in religious tourism in the Langkat Regency.

## **2. RELIGIOUS TOURISM**

Religious tourism is part of the tourism sector where a person travels alone or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary, or recreation [10]. Religious tourism aims to visit pilgrimage sites or places of belief where visitors can fulfill their spiritual and recreational needs [6]. The advantage of religious tourism is that we can learn about the history, superstitions/myths, legends, and the unique architecture of the place [11]. Tourists can be called pilgrims if the motivation for their trip is to fulfill their spiritual or religious needs [12]. Religious tourism destinations include places of worship such as mosques, cathedrals, temples, etc [15]. In addition to visiting places of worship, religious tourism can also be in the form of seeing a religious event, culture, music, exhibitions, or sacred places [16]. Based on several definitions, religious tourism can be divided into two main elements: motivation and destination. Motivation and destination can affect the perception of tourists to visit religious tourism in Langkat Regency so that they want to come back.

## **3. LANDMARK**

The image of the environment of a tourist attraction is mainly identified by the landmark established in the place [17]. A landmark can solely represent a tourist attraction through the character or personality it brings [18]. Each landmark, such as a building, store, or mountain, has a unique character that distinguishes them from other places in the region [9]. In the Image of the City, Lynch (1960) introduced the term "landmark" as a vertical form element that can be observed and function as a guide in wayfinding [9].

The component that plays the role of "landmark" differentiate a place by the legibility and imageability it creates towards a tourist environment [9]. These unique characteristics of the place, such as how it contrasts with the background, different shapes, or spatial location, result in the

landmark being more identifiable [9]. Therefore, a landmark can be a marker for tourists arriving at a tourist attraction [4].

The visibility of landmarks would affect the legibility of an environment by people or, as in this research, tourists. The vivid form of the landmark also simplifies the identification process for the observer. There is at least one significant difference between an object and the environment, such as in a scale, material, shape, etcetera that makes it distinctive from its surroundings. However, the contextuality between an object and its surroundings should be preserved to maintain the harmony of one place's identity. Some other feature that affects the legibility of a landmark is how the landmark is accessible to tourists. Based on the theoretical analysis in determining the landmark elements in religious tourism, there are four elements classified: visibility; recognizability; visual distinction; and accessibility (Table 1). These four elements of a religious tourist destination would generate a memorable tourist experience and raise the revisiting possibility.

The visibility of landmarks would affect the legibility of an environment by people or, as in this research, tourists. The vivid form of the landmark also simplifies the identification process for the observer. At least one significant difference between an object and the environment, such as in size, material, shape, etcetera, makes it distinctive from its surroundings. However, the contextuality between an object and its surroundings should be preserved to maintain the harmony of one place's identity. Some other feature that affects the legibility of a landmark is how the landmark is accessible to tourists. Based on the theoretical analysis in determining the landmark elements in religious tourism, there are four elements classified: visibility, recognizability, visual distinction, and accessibility (Table 1). These four elements of a religious tourist destination would generate a memorable tourist experience and raise the revisiting possibility.

**Table 1: Elements of Landmark**

Landmark	Indicator
Visibility	The location of the building and visible from a distance
Recognizability	Image and identity
Visual Contrast	Material, form, and scale of the building
Accessibility	Access, pedestrian, public transportation, and parking

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

##### 4.1 Research Area

The study location is in Langkat Regency, which has various types of tourism that visitors can visit, such as natural, cultural, religious, historical, and culinary tourism. Langkat Regency has the potential to become national tourism because of its very strategic location. In the study, three religious tourism sites were selected, namely the Azizi Mosque in Tanjung Pura City, Besilam Village or Babussalam in Padang Tualang District, and Shri Murugan Temple in Selesai District. Azizi Mosque and Besilam Village is a form of historical evidence of the Langkat Malay Sultanate. Meanwhile, Shri Murugan Temple is the second-highest temple in the world after the statue of Dewa Murugan in Batu Caves, Malaysia.

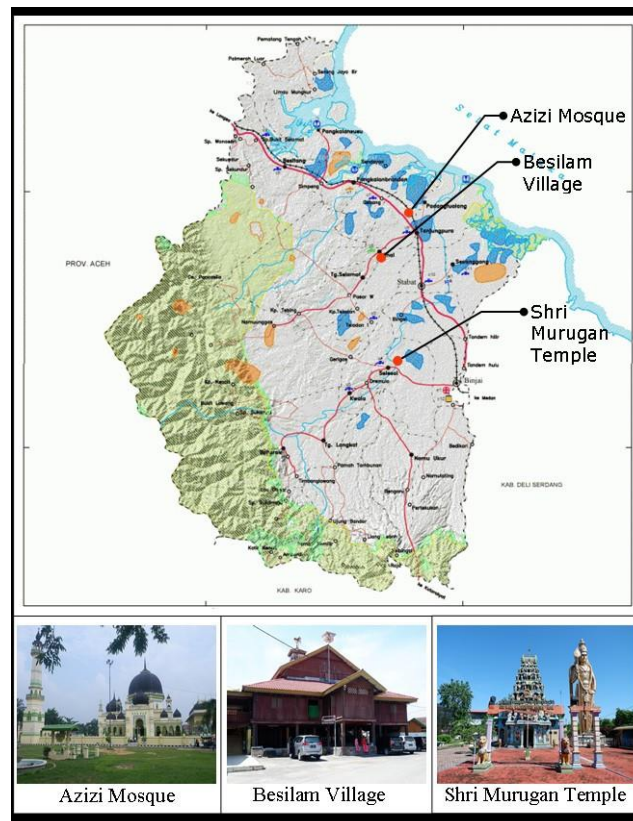


Figure 1: Research Area

##### 4.2 Method

This study uses a mixed-method by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain respondents' perceptions of religious tourism landmarks in Langkat Regency. Qualitative methods employ field observations and in-depth interviews in three religious tourism destinations. In-depth interviews were conducted with three key informants, namely tourism stakeholders, local communities, government, academics, and people directly or indirectly involved in Langkat tourism.

Field observations collect the physical characteristics of buildings, activities, provision of public facilities, access, parking, pedestrians, and everything else needed.

The quantitative method uses a questionnaire with a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) for the variable rate of religious tourism landmarks. Measurement includes landmark elements in religious tourism that are easily visible and recognizable, in contrast to the environment and accessibility. Questionnaires were distributed evenly to 186 local communities in the three tourist areas. The survey results were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 20) to analyze the level of respondents' perceptions so that the average value of the landmark elements. The collected data will be combined, interpreted, and explained with related theories.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 Respondents

There were 62 respondents from each research area, so a total of 186 respondents consisted of 47% women (n = 87) and 53% men (n = 99). The age group of 25-49 years is the largest age group, namely 44%, followed by the age group of 18-24 years at 35%, then 50-64 at 17%, and the age group 65 years and over at 4%. When asked about the length of stay of respondents in North Sumatra, 92.5% said they had lived more than five years, 7% had lived 2-5 years, and 0.5% had lived one year in Langkat Regency.

### 5.2 Landmark Principle

Among the eleven items mentioned in Table 2, the statement with the highest score rating is: "Landmarks have different scales and forms than other buildings" (3,6). This statement indicates that tourists agreed that landmarks in Langkat regency are different in size compared to other buildings within the area. On the contrary, the provision of public facilities gained the lowest ratings, especially the quality of the pedestrian path (2,7).

**Table 2: Mean Ratings of Landmark Principle (n=186)**

Landmark Aspects	Statements	Azizi Mosque	Besilam Village	Shri Murugan Temple	Mean
Visibility	Landmark is easily visible from a distance	3,4	2,4	2,4	2,7
	Landmark is in a strategic location	3,5	2,5	2,4	2,8
Recognizability	I can describe this place	3,2	3,7	2,2	3,1
	This landmark represents the	3,4	3,9	2,2	3,2

Landmark Aspects	Statements	Azizi Mosque	Besilam Village	Shri Murugan Temple	Mean
	identity/character of this region				
Visual Contrast	Landmark has different materials from other buildings	3,3	3,6	3,2	3,4
	Landmark has different forms than other buildings	3,4	3,8	3,5	3,6
	Landmark has different scales/sizes than other buildings	3,3	3,7	3,9	3,6
Accessibility	This place is easy to access	3,6	3,9	3,1	3,5
	The landmark has comfortable pedestrian paths	3,4	2,7	2,1	2,7
	The landmark has at least one good public transportation system	3,5	2,3	3,4	3,1
	Parking conditions in this area are adequate	3,6	3,8	3,2	3,5
(Ratings value: 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree) Mean		3,4	3,3	2,9	

### Visibility

Landmarks within a tourist destination profoundly create the image and act as the symbol of the place [18]. The existence of a particular object as a landmark could benefit the religious tourism destination and differentiate it from other tourism destinations. Therefore, landmark visibility must not be blocked so people can easily discover the tourism destination. Within this research area, the local rates the visibility of the landmark as low, especially for Besilam Village (2,4) and Shri Murugan Temple (2,4). However, The Azizi Mosque gained relatively high ratings (3,4) because it can be seen and accessed from several different routes. Meanwhile, the visibility of Besilam Village and Shri Murugan Temple is only visible from a very close distance due to the crowded housing in the surroundings.

*"The Azizi Mosque is located beside the main road, so it is visible and stands out from its surroundings. Many people who travel to Banda Aceh and vice versa would also stop by this Mosque."* (Key respondent: Local figure)

Also, a building is considered a landmark of a tourist destination if it can be seen from various angles of height and points of perspective. This research shows that respondents gave low ratings for the

location of the research objects classified as strategic (The Azizi Mosque (3,5); Besilam Village (2,5); Shri Murugan Temple (2,4)). The Azizi Mosque received positive feedback for its location, connecting Medan and Banda Aceh. In contrast, Besilam Village and Shri Murugan Temple are not located on cross-city roads and are only being visited for special religious events.

### **Recognizability**

Any visual landmarks should be able to help people to identify an area or place [19]. The unique character of an object would make a place memorable so that it would be easier to describe [20]. In this research area, the local rate Azizi Mosque (3,2) and Desa Besilam (3,7) as highly describable, while Shri Murugan Temple gained low ratings for its recognizability (2,2). The local states can describe the religious tourist object well, referring to Azizi Mosque and Besilam Village, but are roughly able to describe Shri Murugan Temple. These findings show that the characters of Shri Murugan Temple are not acting well as symbols or images in the region [9]. This is also supported by the local's statement:

*"One of the most authentic historical sites in Langkat Regency is The Azizi Mosque. This mosque's uniqueness can be seen through its shape, ornaments, and colors that make it easy to illustrate."*  
(Key respondent: Local figure)

A landmark also has to define the place or city where it was established because it has reference points in its surroundings [21]. This research shows that Shri Murugan Temple does not profoundly act as the representative of Langkat Regency, especially as a religious tourist destination. The assessment confirms the findings that the other two objects in this research, Azizi Mosque (3,4) and Besilam Village (3,9), gained high remarks. Yet, Shri Murugan (2,2) is still considered low in how its identity act as a reference point to the region. This could also be affected by the fact that the majority of local's religion is Islam, so it would be challenging for Shri Murugan Temple to be a part of the religious tourist destination in Langkat.

### **Visual Contrast**

A landmark should contrast with its surroundings to highlight itself within the place [9]. This particular character that highlights the landmark is specifically referred to as a visual character that may have a unique purpose or history. The distinctiveness theory also says landmarks must be distinguishable from nearby objects or surroundings [22]. Therefore, landmarks should have some elements that distinguish them from others. This research assesses the visual contrast through the religious destinations' material, shape, and size [17].

In this research area, the local rates highly toward the distinctive material used in the three research objects (Azizi Mosque (3.3), Besilam village (3.6), and Shri Murugan Temple (3.2)). The Azizi Mosque material is imported explicitly from Malaysia, and the walls are made of concrete with a yellow-based color and green ornaments for the exterior. The sixteen windows of the Mosque itself

were imported from Murano, Italy, and are stained glasses with ornamental plants. Besilam Village has black-wood material for its walls. And Shri Murugan Temple used the same material as used in The Murugan Statue in Batu Caves, Malaysia: steel, concrete and gold liquid.



**Figure 2: Visual of Religious Tourism**

A landmark as a symbol should also identify a city through its visual form, which contains something unique and distinctive from other places. The assessment shows a high rating for the three research objects: Azizi Mosque (3.4), Besilam village (3.8), and Shri Murugan Temple (3.5), for having different physical forms compared to other buildings within the area. The Azizi Mosque has a vision of an Islamic Mosque in India with an octagonal dome and tower. The Mosque's roof is a large dome surrounded by relatively smaller domes. Meanwhile, Besilam Village is adopting the stage housing style. And Shri Murugan Temple is shaped like a pyramid with sculptured walls and a gigantic Murugan Statue on the side (Figure 2).

Different sizes, as a contrast to the environment or other buildings, also gained a high rating in this research: Azizi Mosque (3.3), Besilam village (3.7), and Shri Murugan Temple (3.9) (Table 2). The octagonal tower of Azizi Mosque is 35 meters in height, Besilam Village's Mosque with its 15 meters tall tower, and Shri Murugan Temple with its 17 meters God Murugan Statue which is claimed to be the second-highest in the world.

*"Shri Murugan Temple has a 17 meters tall statue in the shape of God Murugan, known as the god of war and protector of the Tamil. This Statue is the second tallest statue of god Murugan in the world."* (Key respondent: Local figure)

The findings show that the three research objects gained high ratings for their visual contrast with their surroundings. Besides the materials, shapes, and sizes that differentiate them, other elements such as colors, ornaments, and details also distinguish them from their surroundings.

### **Accessibility**

Accessibility is a characteristic feature of a physical landmark. Can be seen in a building, objects that are at a crossroads, or even the intersection itself can be a landmark because of its easy access



from several lanes. The definition of accessibility itself is the ease of being able to move from a starting place to a destination [24]. Access for tourists to a destination can influence the attractiveness and potential of the tourism destination itself [24].

The community considers the ease of access to the entrance to the study area to be quite good; Azizi Mosque (3.6), Besilam Village (3.9), and Shri Murugan Temple (3.1) (Table 2). Visitors will be interested in visiting an area if the access is easy to achieve [20]. So it can conclude that the ease of access can increase the desire of people to come. Unfortunately, the results from field observations showed that the quality of pedestrian access paths was still lacking, especially in Besilam Village and Shri Murugan Temple. For the convenience of the pedestrian path, the respondents gave a meager rating; Azizi Mosque (3.4), Besilam Village (2.7), and Shri Murugan Temple (2.1). This low rating is because the pavement at the destination is damaged, making visitors uncomfortable and unsafe when walking. Traders also use pedestrian paths to sell (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Pedestrian Path**

A tourist destination can be said to have good accessibility if public transportation can easily to find [20]. In Besilam Village, the public transportation system is not good (Beslam Village = 2.3), because there is no public transportation that goes to Besilam Village, therefore tourist destinations are difficult to reach. While the Azizi Mosque and Shri Murugan Temple, the community considers quite good (Azizi Mosque 3.5; Shri Murugan Temple 3.4) (Table 2). Parking conditions in the area are also a reference for visitors to want to come. Table 2 shows that the availability of parking spaces in tourist areas is quite good (Aziz Mosque 3.6; Besilam Village 3.8; and Shri Murugan Temple 3.2). However, the parking area must be expanded again for the Azizi Mosque because it cannot accommodate all pilgrims. Statements from the interviewees also support this:

"The availability of parking space at the Azizi Mosque is still not wide enough. During Friday prayers, the Azizi Mosque is full of visitors, so the congregation uses the road as a parking lot." (Key Respondent: Local Figure).

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**Figure 4 Parking Facilities**

The research concludes that the Azizi Mosque gets the highest accessibility rating. Although parking is available at tourist destinations, it must improve. The mobility of roads and pedestrian paths should also get more attention because they can affect the desire of visitors to come. If road mobility is good, public transportation can reach all tourist attractions in Langkat Regency.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This research explores four principles of landmarks, namely visibility, recognizability, visual contrast, and accessibility. Landmarks serve to create easily recognizable images of cities and places [18] and can make it easier for someone to find pleasant and unique places in the form of culture, activities, history, and buildings. Of the four Landmark elements, visibility gets the worst response, because the location of tourist attractions is less strategic and cannot be seen clearly from a distance. Aspects of recognition, visual contrast, and accessibility received a good response. The uniqueness of the three elements can distinguish it from other tourist destinations [9]. Religious tourism has become a symbol of the Langkat Regency because it has a distinctive shape and scales different from other religious tourist attractions. Unfortunately, the condition of the pedestrian path is not suitable for use and can even be said to have been damaged. Not only that, but traders who sell on the sidewalk are also a

problem. Access to tourist attractions is an important influence for visitors to come [24]. Because of that, it is essential to improve access to religious destinations to create a feeling of wanting to return for visitors. Further research would be better to examine other elements of distinctiveness such as particular character, uniqueness, and different perception.

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