

Revitalization of Nyai Sedapu Boja Kendal Tomb as a Cultural-Based Religious Tourism Epicenter

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**Kumala Nur
Afiah*)**

Universitas Islam
Negeri (UIN)
Walisongo Semarang
E-mail:
kumalaalfiya05@gmail.com

Lukmanul Hakim

Universitas Islam
Negeri (UIN)
Walisongo Semarang
E-mail:
elhakim@walisongo.ac.id

Dedy Susanto

Universitas Islam
Negeri (UIN)
Walisongo Semarang
E-mail:
dedysusanto@walisongo.ac.id

Siti Prihatiningtyas

Universitas Islam
Negeri (UIN)
Walisongo Semarang
E-mail:
siti.prihatiningtyas@walisongo.ac.id

*) *Corresponding Author*

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Abstract: Revitalization of culture-based religious sites is an important approach in developing sustainable and local value-based tourist destinations. This research aims to analyze the revitalization strategy of the Tomb of Nyai Sedapu as the epicenter of culture-based religious tourism in Boja, Kendal by referring to the principles of *good governance* in governance. This research uses a qualitative approach with the methods of observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The results showed that revitalization was carried out through physical development and preservation of cultural values through local traditions. Community participation, legality of management through the village government, and information disclosure are real practices of transparency, accountability and rule of law. However, challenges remain in the limitations of digital promotion and budget support. This research shows that the management of religious sites that apply the principles of *good governance* can be an alternative model in the development of cultural and spiritual-based tourism.

Abstrak: Revitalisasi situs keagamaan berbasis budaya merupakan pendekatan penting dalam mengembangkan destinasi pariwisata berkelanjutan yang didasarkan pada nilai-nilai lokal. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi revitalisasi Makam Nyai Sedapu sebagai pusat pariwisata keagamaan berbasis budaya di Boja, Kendal, dengan mengacu pada prinsip-prinsip tata kelola yang baik. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa revitalisasi dicapai melalui pengembangan fisik dan pelestarian nilai-nilai budaya melalui tradisi lokal. Partisipasi masyarakat, pengelolaan hukum melalui pemerintah desa, dan transparansi informasi merupakan contoh praktis dari transparansi, akuntabilitas, dan supremasi hukum. Namun, tantangan masih ada dalam hal promosi digital yang terbatas dan dukungan anggaran. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa pengelolaan situs keagamaan yang menerapkan prinsip tata kelola yang baik dapat menjadi model alternatif untuk pengembangan pariwisata berbasis budaya dan spiritual.

INTRODUCTION

Boja, a region in Kendal Regency, Central Java, preserves a vibrant legacy of local history and culture that continues to live through the practices of its community. One of its most notable symbols of spiritual heritage is the tomb of Nyai Sedapu, a respected local figure believed to possess supernatural abilities and to have contributed greatly to the dissemination of religious knowledge and the advancement of the community's agricultural economy. The site functions not only as a destination for pilgrimage but also as a focal point for intergenerational cultural and spiritual activities, reflecting the deep historical connection between the spread of Islam in Java and the identity of the local people. Despite its significance, efforts to revitalize and develop the site have faced delays. This is largely due to weak regulatory frameworks, limited optimization of participatory mechanisms despite active community involvement, and a lack of consistent facilitation from higher levels of government to strengthen collaboration between local managers and residents. These challenges suggest that without stronger institutional support, the potential of the Nyai Sedapu tomb as both a spiritual and cultural resource will remain underutilized.

Studies on religious tourism rooted in local wisdom show that its development depends on active community participation and accountable governance Rohaeni & Emilda (2021). Nadilah (2023) highlights that the revitalization of burial sites is most effective when it preserves historical, architectural, and spiritual values that strengthen local identity. Muhajarah (2022), using the example of the Grand Mosque of Demak, shows how religious tourism can function as *da'wah bi al-hal* by integrating community participation in destination management. This perspective is reinforced by Erniwati et al. (2023) and Asril et al. (2024), who emphasize that a participatory process from planning to implementation is crucial for meaningful results. Conversely, Nabilah et al. (2024) and Rizqi & Prayogi (2022) warn that restoration efforts that focus only on physical aspects, while neglecting spiritual and communal dimensions, often fail to achieve sustainability. A synthesis of these findings shows that the core issues during revitalization go beyond physical restoration to include governance structures, the depth of community involvement, and the preservation of spiritual values. At the same time, the existence of a clear legal and institutional framework is critical in ensuring that the revitalization process is not only technically successful but also meaningful and sustainable in the long term. This is the focus of this study for further exploration.

While numerous studies have explored the revitalization of religious sites and community involvement, research that combines cultural approaches with good governance principles in rural Central Java remains scarce. Findings from Wahyuni (2021) and Abdussamad (2021) reveal persistent challenges such as weak regulations, underutilized participatory planning forums, and a lack of transparency in managing religious destinations. On the other hand, digital platforms like SIPAREKRAF have proven effective in promoting and managing tourism Ilya Sahira & Zulkarnaini (2023), though their application in Boja is hindered by limitations in human resource capacity and technical support.

This study offers two distinctive contributions that move beyond existing research on religious tourism. The first contribution lies in advancing theoretical perspectives by foregrounding the role of women in local history and spirituality an aspect rarely explored in previous studies. By centering the figure of Nyai Sedapu, the research enriches the discourse on religious tourism with a gendered dimension of spiritual leadership and heritage preservation. The second contribution is practical in nature, as it develops a community-based revitalization framework in which local residents are positioned as primary agents of preservation rather than passive beneficiaries. This framework not only integrates cultural conservation, local identity reinforcement, and good governance principles but also provides concrete guidance for managing religious heritage sites in ways that are participatory and sustainable. Accordingly, the study focuses on the revitalization of the Nyai Sedapu Tomb in Boja, Kendal, as a culture-based religious tourism hub, emphasizing the involvement of the community and village government in site management, cultural preservation, and governance practices, while assessing its potential to strengthen local identity and contribute to the sustainable development of religious tourism.

The selection of informants in this study used purposive sampling with the support of snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was chosen because the researcher had determined from the outset that the caretaker would be the main informant, given his strategic position as the manager of the tomb, which gave him authority and in-depth knowledge of the traditions and management of the Nyai Sedapu tomb. During the interview process, the caretaker also recommended interviewing other cemetery managers to expand the information. However, because the caretaker himself also acted as a manager, the data obtained from him was considered representative. This condition shows the characteristics of snowball sampling, namely that the researcher obtained references for informants from previous informants.

This strategy is in line with H. Hasanah (2016) assertion that in qualitative research, the presence of key persons or key figures is very important to ensure the depth of data and the validity of the research results. In addition, the validity of this research is not only strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods, but also by considering the potential for subjective bias. This is in line with Patton (1999) view that triangulation can reduce the weaknesses that arise when researchers use only one approach in data collection. Furthermore, data analysis follows the interactive model of Miles & Huberman A. M (1994), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification, so that the data processing process remains systematic and academically accountable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The tomb of Nyai Sedapu is not only the resting place of a female figure who contributed to the spread of Islam in Java, but also a spiritual symbol and local cultural heritage that continues to be preserved by the Boja community. The current condition of Nyai Sedapu Tomb shows a combination of preservation of historical values and efforts to develop local culture-based religious destinations. Physically, the tomb area has undergone several improvements including the construction of a tomb enclosure, entrance gate, prayer room, bathroom, and better road access which is now more representative and comfortable for pilgrims. The cleanliness of the area is routinely maintained through weekly cleaning activities by the tomb manager and through nyadran activities (mass grave cleaning and tasyakuran). However, there are no complete tourist facilities such as an adequate parking area. The availability of facilities at the Nyai Sedapu Tomb, although not yet fully adequate, demonstrates an effort to fulfill the elements of attraction, amenities, and accessibility, similar to the development strategy applied at the Sunan Kalijaga Tomb. This shows that the implementation of the 3A concept is an essential step in strengthening religious tourism appeal L. Hasanah et al. (2023)

The cultural, spiritual, and historical value of the tomb serves as a tourist attraction, considering that Nyai Sedapu is a local figure with lineage from an important figure in the history of Islam in Java. During cultural tradition processions, the village government provides funding and participates actively. The legality of the manager, established through a decree from the Village Head and the caretaker's appointment from the Regent, reflects strong legal recognition. However, the main challenge faced by the manager is limited funds for further revitalization and the lack of optimal response from the district government to support the development of this area as a leading religious tourism destination. From a governance perspective, the legality and support of the village government in Boja are consistent with Hakim & Nurhadi (2024) view, which stresses that the management of religious tourism villages requires a strong regulatory foundation, community participation, and multi-stakeholder partnerships to ensure sustainability. However, challenges related to digital promotion and limited funding highlight the importance of collaborative governance. Susanto et al. (2023) emphasized that collaboration between the government, community, and other institutions is crucial for the success of religious tourism development, especially in improving service professionalism and destination reputation.

Strengthening spiritual values, togetherness, and preservation of local culture are the main goals that encourage the Boja community to carry out three ancestral heritage traditions at certain times of the year: nyadran, syawalan, and kirab budaya.

- Nyadran is held every Sunday kliwon before Eid al-Fitr and includes grave cleaning, joint prayers, tasyakuran, tambourine performances, and communal meals.
- Syawalan takes place a few days after Eid and serves as a moment of friendship among residents.
- Cultural Kirab is held annually from the village hall to the tomb complex, showcasing traditional arts and symbols of crops, and closing with the handover of luwur as a sign of respect. In addition, the position of Nyai Sedapu Tomb as part of the Islamic historical network in Java can be compared to the potential of Walisongo-based educational tourism. (Susanto et al., 2024) demonstrated that Walisongo's legacy has great appeal for educational tourism as it embodies historical, spiritual, and Islamic identity-strengthening values in Java.

These traditions strengthen social ties and reinforce cultural values, supporting the revitalization of the tomb as a culture-based religious tourism destination.

Inconsistency of Good Governance Principles in Tomb Governance

This research aims to evaluate the governance of the revitalization of Nyai Sedapu Tomb by referring to the four main principles of good governance, which include accountability, transparency, participation, and the rule of law (Soedarmayanti, 2013). These principles are used as an analytical framework to see to what extent the management of the tomb reflects good governance, not only from the physical aspect but also in terms of village administration and community involvement. The findings in the field show that some of these principles have been implemented quite well, especially at the local community level. Community participation is strong in the implementation of cultural activities such as kirab, tasyakuran, and art performances. The process of building facilities also involves open village deliberations, with the involvement of community leaders, village officials, and cemetery administrators. The local youth organization and arts community are also active in the management of the event, demonstrating a sense of ownership of this cultural site. This is in line with the spirit of good governance, which emphasizes the involvement of citizens in every decision-making process.

Transparency is evident through the provision of public information on the village and tomb websites managed by the administrators. Information such as the history of the tomb, schedule of activities, and contact details of the key teachers can be accessed by pilgrims and the general public. Activity funds from the Village Budget (ADD) and self-help are also discussed in village forums as a form of open accountability. However, not all principles of good governance have been implemented in an integrated manner. One of the main obstacles is the district government's lack of response to the revitalization proposal submitted by the makam. This indicates weak coordination across institutions and access to public resources. This gap has prevented destination development efforts from being optimized, despite strong initiatives at the village level. As a result, the principles of accountability and the rule of law have not been fully implemented in a broader scope. Scientifically, these findings show that successful governance is not enough to implement one or two principles separately. Integration between principles is required for the system to run effectively. When transparency and participation exist without vertical coordination and legal certainty, the practice of good governance becomes lame. Rasyid & Darumurti (2022) mentioned that weak vertical communication is often an obstacle in the development of culture-based tourism, as reflected in this problem.

The results of this study are consistent with the study Pusida et al. (2021) which emphasizes the importance of transparency in the use of village funds in strengthening public accountability. In addition, conformity is also found in the view of Seka, Juanda, et al. (2022) which states that participatory development strengthens social legitimacy in tourism management. However, this study places particular emphasis on the incompatibility between principles as the root of the problem. It is not enough to have participation or transparency because successful management requires synergy between governance elements. Therefore, policy alignment between levels of government and strengthening coordination between actors is an urgent matter to improve. Revitalization at the village level needs to be supported institutionally through a structured

and sustainable mechanism. Affirming the rule of law through consistent regulations, as well as the openness of the bureaucracy in responding to local needs, are important steps towards fair and sustainable governance.

Similar findings are reflected in the innovations carried out by the Sunan Muria Mosque and Tomb Foundation, where transparent management, participatory governance, and service-oriented reforms are combined with tangible improvements such as safer access roads, communal facilities for pilgrims, and architectural redesign to align religious tourism management with Islamic values and community needs. This experience demonstrates that sustainable religious tourism is achieved not only through infrastructure upgrades, but also through clear regulations, accountable financial practices, and active collaboration among stakeholders, creating a model of governance that strengthens public trust and preserves the spiritual character of the site (Susanto et al., 2023).

Strengthening Tradition Through Revitalization

The revitalization of Nyai Sedapu Tomb in Boja focuses not only on physical aspects, but also on strengthening local cultural identity. As a pilgrimage site that has historical and spiritual value, this tomb has the potential to become an educational center for Islamic culture and history in Central Java. According to Gintulangi (2022) sustainable religious tourism management must involve the preservation of the traditions of the Islamic community and the improvement of the local economy. The historical narrative of Nyai Sedapu as a student of Sunan Kalijaga and a descendant of Pandanaran I provides added value in the context of religious tourism. This story can be developed through a storytelling approach that appeals to the younger generation. This approach is in line with the sustainable religious tourism management strategy that emphasizes the importance of preserving local traditions and culture. Previous researchers have not optimally discussed the narrative in current academic studies. The lack of documentation and attractive promotional media makes the historical value of this tomb less widely known. This suggests the need for an effective communication strategy to revitalize the local cultural values contained in the site. In this context, revitalization includes not only physical but also educational content development that can be delivered through various media. For example, the creation of documentary videos, local history books, or digital applications that contain Nyai Sedapu and her role in the spread of Islam in Central Java.

The development of educational content can also involve the local community, especially the younger generation, to increase the attractiveness of Nyai Sedapu Tomb. Saefudin et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of digital training for the community in utilizing social media for tourism promotion and oral history preservation. This also opens up new business opportunities and increases the income of local communities. The implementation of digital promotion strategies needs to be applied at the Nyai Sedapu Tomb to strengthen local cultural identity and attract the younger generation to take part in the management of the tomb site. One of the aspects that can be utilized as the main content of digital promotion is the local cultural narrative that grows organically around the tomb site. There are a number of traditions of the Boja village community that are carried out annually and make the tomb of Nyai Sedapu as the main titik or epicenter of its activities. These traditions not only contain spiritual value, but also become a living cultural expression and have the potential to be developed as a culture-based religious tourism attraction. Three of them are nyadran, syawalan, and kirab budaya, each of which has a strong activity structure and symbolic meaning.

1. Nyadran

The people of Boja hold the Nyadran tradition every Sunday Kliwon on the Javanese calendar before Eid al-Fitr. This tradition includes cleaning the grave, praying together, tasyakuran, tambourine performance, and eating together. The whole series takes place in an atmosphere of mutual cooperation and kinship. Nyadran has potential as a religious tourism attraction. The elements of mass participation, spiritual values, and traditional art expressions make it suitable to be packaged as narrative content in destination promotion. In line with the findings Saputri et al. (2021), the practice of nyadran plays a role in building a strong sense of nationality, togetherness, and awareness of local identity in the community. This

tradition also fosters local identity, togetherness, and love for the country that grows from its own cultural roots.

2. *Syawalan*

Boja people gather again at the grave of Nyai Sedapu a few days after Eid al-Fitr. This tradition strengthens spirituality and social bonds between residents, including migrants going home. To preserve it, a strategy based on documentation and digital media is needed. According to Nuraini et al. (2023), e- booklets of local traditions can expand the reach of education and cultural preservation. Digital media not only disseminates information, but also preserves cultural values.

3. *Cultural Kirab*

The people of Boja held a cultural procession as part of the annual celebration at the tomb of Nyai Sedapu. The kirab started from the village hall office to the tomb complex and featured tambourine, kuda lumping, drum band, and gunungan of crops. The event was closed with the handover of luwur (cloth covering the tomb) from the village head to the caretaker as a form of respect. This Kirab reflects the strength of the community in preserving culture. Digital documentation plays an important role in promotion and preservation efforts. Findings by Lestari & Hudaiddah (2023) corroborate that community participation is important in the development of culture-based religious tourism.

The approach to developing religious traditions such as nyadran, syawalan, and cultural parades at the Nyai Sedapu Tomb is in line with the principle of revitalizing tombs as religious tourist attractions that emphasize cultural preservation and community empowerment. Erniwati et al. (2023) show that the revitalization of Chinese tombs in the Old Town of Padang was carried out through asset-based community development, which combines the preservation of historical values, improvement of facilities, and community involvement so that the tomb site becomes a sustainable cultural and spiritual tourist attraction. Meanwhile, Sukma Saputra et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of fulfilling the four components of tourist attraction, accessibility, amenities, and institutional support in managing the Pangeran Purbaya Tomb area to encourage post-pandemic recovery and improve the welfare of the surrounding community. These two findings reinforce the argument that the management of the Nyai Sedapu Tomb needs to combine the preservation of local traditions with institutional strengthening and community empowerment in order to develop as a competitive and sustainable religious tourism destination.

Strengthening Stakeholder Collaboration in Revitalization

The revitalization of Nyai Sedapu's Tomb is not enough to focus on physical aspects or preservation of traditions, but needs to be directed at strengthening destination competitiveness through innovation and cross-sector collaboration. Although various efforts have been made such as the provision of gates, provision of pilgrim facilities, and routine management of cultural traditions, the main challenge is the limited digital promotion and sustainable cross-institutional support. This is in accordance with the interview with the tomb manager who mentioned that promotion is still local and self-supporting, and the management of cultural events such as the carnival fully relies on assistance from the village and community participation. When compared to other religious tourism destinations such as Ki Marogan Tomb in Palembang or Batu Ampar Tomb in Pamekasan, the manager of Nyai Sedapu Tomb is still lagging behind in the aspect of digitizing sustainable promotion. Both destinations have established active collaboration with local governments, creative economy actors, and digital media to increase tourist visits. Research by Junaedi et al. (2023) shows that the application of *virtual reality* (VR) technology in religious tourism promotion can improve visitor experience and attract new tourists. This shows that digital innovation can be an effective tool in promoting religious tourism destinations, including the Tomb of Nyai Sedapu. Digital innovation is a crucial aspect in expanding the reach of religious tourism promotion. The historical and cultural potential of Nyai Sedapu, who was a student of Sunan Kalijaga and a descendant of Pandanaran I, is an important narrative that has not been widely published visually or interactively. This narrative can be developed in the form of digital storytelling, documentary videos, and *augmented reality* (AR) features that allow visitors to experience history immersively.

In addition to digital innovation, a *co-branding* strategy between the tourism village, local government, and art community is important to improve the position of Nyai Sedapu's Tomb as a leading destination in Kendal.

The cultural procession that has involved youth organizations, art communities, and villagers has actually shown a collaborative spirit. However, the involvement of the private sector or formal tourism institutions is less than optimal, which only supports the cultural kirab event. So that the other potential sides of this tomb are less noticed. According to Mulyasari et al. (2023) the role of arts and cultural communities is very important in the development of culturally independent villages. By involving the arts community in planning and implementing tourism programs, villages can create attractive and sustainable cultural tourism packages. These findings corroborate that *co-branding* involving multiple stakeholders, including the private sector and formal tourism institutions, can improve the existence of Nyai Sedapu's Tomb as a leading tourist destination in Kendal.

A concrete step that shows the great potential of this tomb in an educational context is the attention of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), which has elevated the historical narrative of Nyai Sedapu to be part of a digital book (*e-book*) for elementary school students. The presence of this content signifies that Nyai Sedapu's tomb has significant historical and cultural value at the national level. This opportunity can be an entry point to encourage more optimal revitalization, by involving the education sector as a strategic partner in the development of educational tourism. If developed further, this tomb will not only be a place of pilgrimage, but also a learning laboratory for local history, targeting the younger generation from an early age. Activity models such as annual religious festivals, educational pilgrimage programs for students, and mini historical exhibitions about the figure of Nyai Sedapu can be concrete solutions to boost tourist attractiveness. This idea is in line with the tomb manager's hope that visits will increase and the attraction will not only be local. This will also open up opportunities for community economic empowerment, such as the provision of local culinary, souvenirs, and communist-based tour guide services. In line with research Suning & Hawanayu Rahmadhany (2022) emphasizes the importance of a creative economy-based tourism village development strategy through collaboration between actors that can strengthen destination identity and create added value through creative tourism product development and effective digital promotion. This finding is relevant to the revitalization efforts of the Tomb of Nyai Sedapu, where cross-sector collaboration can increase the competitiveness and sustainability of the religious tourism destination. Thus, strengthening the competitiveness of Nyai Sedapu's Tomb as an epicenter of culture-based religious tourism must be directed at three things, including digital content innovation, strengthening collaborative networks between local actors, and developing creative tourism products. This strategy not only expands the reach of promotion, but also makes revitalization more economically, culturally, and spiritually impactful.

At the same time, the revitalization of Nyai Sedapu's Tomb cannot be separated from the urgency of digital literacy in today's era. As emphasized by Sabila & Mutofin (2023), digital technology offers vast opportunities for disseminating Islamic values and strengthening religious literacy through social media, while also requiring critical skills to filter information and avoid the spread of hoaxes that may undermine social harmony. Strengthening digital literacy within the community and among managers will ensure that revitalization programs such as digital content innovation, educational tours, and creative economy initiatives are effectively communicated, widely promoted, and meaningfully understood. In this way, the educational and cultural potential of Nyai Sedapu's Tomb can be maximized not only as a local heritage site but also as a sustainable religious tourism destination with national resonance.

In addition, revitalization efforts for Nyai Sedapu's Tomb also require a strong branding strategy in the digital era, particularly through the role of public relations. As explained in the study of An-Nur II Islamic Boarding School, the use of digital public relations has proven effective in shaping institutional image, building trust, and expanding audience engagement by utilizing integrated media such as websites, social media, and online publications (Fitri & Lailiyah, 2023). Applying this approach in the context of Nyai Sedapu's Tomb can help construct a positive image not only as a sacred pilgrimage site but also as an educational and cultural tourism destination with national recognition. Through storytelling, content innovation, and participatory communication with stakeholders, public relations can strengthen the branding of the site, ensuring that revitalization is not merely technical but also resonates with wider publics. This synergy between creative economy strategies and digital branding practices will reinforce the tomb's competitiveness and long-term sustainability as an epicenter of culture based religious tourism.

CONCLUSION

The Nyai Sedapu Tomb in Boja has significant potential as a culturally based religious tourism destination capable of elevating local identity. However, its utilization has not been optimal due to limited governance integration and minimal cross-institutional support. Research shows that the management and revitalization efforts of this tomb reflect the application of some principles of good governance, particularly participation and transparency. Community participation is evident through the active involvement of residents, youth organizations, and arts communities in cultural activities such as Nyadran (the procession of the ceremonial prayer), Syawalan (the traditional ceremony of the ceremonial prayer), and cultural parades. Transparency is reflected in the openness of information on the village website and public forums that contain the tomb's history, activity schedules, and funding sources, which are discussed through deliberation.

However, these positive achievements have not been fully integrated. Minimal support from the district government and weak vertical coordination hinder the optimal implementation of the principles of accountability and the rule of law. The proposed revitalization has not received adequate institutional support, resulting in several important facilities, such as parking areas and supporting tourism infrastructure, not being fully developed. This situation emphasizes that sustainable revitalization requires synergy between all principles of good governance, not just partial implementation.

From a cultural and spiritual perspective, the Tomb of Nyai Sedapu holds significant historical value as the tomb of a female Islamic figure who shares a lineage with Sunan Kalijaga. This value offers unique and educational storytelling opportunities. However, limited digital promotion, minimal educational content, and a lack of creative tourism innovation have prevented its appeal from expanding beyond the local context. The traditions surrounding the tomb, such as Nyadran (the procession of the deceased), Syawalan (the traditional Javanese ritual), and cultural parades, embody values of togetherness, spirituality, and cultural identity that can be developed into promotional content and tourism product development.

Therefore, strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of the Tomb of Nyai Sedapu requires three main strategies: (1) digital content innovation, including storytelling, virtual reality technology, and educational media; (2) cross-sector collaboration involving local governments, creative economy actors, the private sector, and educational institutions; and (3) development of creative tourism products based on local traditions. By aligning governance, cultural preservation, and innovation, the revitalization of Nyai Sedapu's Tomb has the potential to develop into a religious-cultural tourism destination that will have economic, cultural, and spiritual impacts, while strengthening local identity and preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

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