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## NATIONAL HERITAGE POTENTIAL SITE: EMPHASIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORIC CORE SPATIAL AREAS IN KOTA KINABALU

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### Abstract:

Heritage symbolizes the community of a place and provides its residents with a sense of identity, belonging, and pride. The historical cores of cities, where many important buildings are located, play a crucial role in shaping a city's identity. However, these historical cores and their built heritage are often threatened by modern development, leading to a loss of identity. The historical core of Kota Kinabalu, the capital of the Malaysian state of Sabah, is no exception to this unfortunate trend. To evaluate the significance of the historic core sites in Kota Kinabalu, site observations and expert interviews were conducted in both semi-structured and open-ended formats. The assessment was based on six indicators of significance: building typology, historical importance, social and cultural associations, aesthetic value, information value, and the richness, diversity, or unusual integration of features. These indicators were derived from the criteria outlined in Section 67 of the National Heritage Act of 2005. The analysis of the interviews was done using ATLAS.ti software, and the qualitative data were presented in graphic forms. While all six indicators were generally considered relevant, some experts disagreed regarding the suitability of building typology, aesthetic value, and informational value for the historic core of Kota Kinabalu. This study findings demonstrate that the historic core of Kota Kinabalu deserves designation as a National Heritage site. Furthermore, it encourages other Malaysian cities to

utilize the same indicators to advocate for the preservation of their own historic cores.

**Keywords:**

Heritage, identity, National Heritage site, Kota Kinabalu, historic core

## Introduction

Heritage encompasses the features that belong to a specific society, including traditions, languages, and buildings created in the past, all of which have historical significance (Rizzo & Prieto, 2023; Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). UNESCO (2021) characterizes heritage as cultural properties that can exist in both tangible and intangible forms. In simple terms, heritage consists of the creations passed down to us from those who came before. According to Alexander (1974), the importance of built heritage extends beyond its monetary value; it provides residents with a sense of place, identity, and pride. The historical city centres play a vital role in defining a city's identity (Misni & Basir, 2023). Ertan and Eğercioğlu (2016) argue that these urban areas must be treated with care through conservation and regeneration, as they act as a bridge connecting a city's past to its future. However, the historic cores of cities are at risk of losing their identity due to unregulated modern development and urban regeneration efforts (al-Saffar, 2018). Such developments often lead to the encroachment of commercial complexes and high-rise buildings into the historic core, undermining its unique and historical urban landscape. Without appropriate regulations and conservation measures, these areas risk losing their distinctive appearance and character, resulting in a homogenization that strips the city of its history and uniqueness as modern buildings replace older structures.

Designating an area as a heritage site can help counteract the decline of historical cores by promoting conservation and restoration efforts. In Malaysia, sites recognized as national heritage are required to develop and adhere to a conservation management plan as outlined in Section 46 of the National Heritage Act 2005. These responsibilities are vital for protecting a city's historic core against loss of identity and cultural heritage. This study aims to assess the significance of the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a heritage site with two primary objectives: to evaluate the importance of the cultural and built heritages within this area and to propose a designated heritage core site along with its buffer zones. This approach seeks to protect and conserve the Kota Kinabalu historic core while exploring its significance concerning the criteria for national heritage site designation established by the National Heritage Act 2005.

## Literature Review

### *Heritage Site*

Heritage refers to an area that encompasses one or more significant cultural elements. According to Al-Sakkaf et al. (2020), a heritage site is defined as a historical location, structure, or area that houses objects or values of cultural and historical significance, representing the civilization of a community (Misni & Basir, 2022; Roslan et al., 2017). Therefore, a heritage site serves as a physical manifestation of the untouched natural environment, which is considered vital to a nation or region's heritage. World Heritage Sites, as designated by UNESCO, are selected based on ten criteria that honour human cultural achievements or the importance of natural resources, whether for their aesthetic value or conservation significance (UNESCO, 2022). Currently, no national heritage site in Malaysia includes the historical core or district of any city on the National Heritage Register. However, Section 24 of the National

Heritage Act of 2005 grants the Commissioner the authority to designate any location that has the potential to contribute to the nation's cultural or natural heritage as a heritage site, meaning there are no restrictions on designating a city's historic centre as a heritage site.

### ***National Heritage Act 2005***

Heritage sites in Sabah are governed by two sets of laws: The National Heritage Act 2005, which operates at the federal level, and the Sabah Heritage Enactment 2017, which pertains to the state level. These laws define the criteria for designating objects or places as either National Heritage or Sabah State Heritage and outline the responsibilities that arise once a site is classified as a heritage site. According to Section 67 of the National Heritage Act 2005, a heritage site—which can include heritage objects or living persons—may be declared as National Heritage. The specific nine criteria for this designation are detailed in Table 1.

### ***Sabah Heritage Enactment 2017***

Section 55 of the Sabah Heritage Enactment 2017 closely mirrors the previously mentioned considerations, with the exception that subsection (a) specifies "the historical importance, association with, or relationship to Sabah history," while sub-section (h) has been omitted. Once a location is recognized as a heritage site, both the National Heritage Act of 2005 and the Sabah Heritage Enactment of 2017 mandate the establishment of a conservation area. This is outlined in Sections 45 and 39 of the respective Act and Enactment. The laws stipulate the following:

- a) When a site is designated as a heritage site, it automatically becomes a conservation area on the date of designation, and it must be conserved and preserved according to a conservation management plan.
- b) A conservation area may: Incorporates a buffer zone around a central core; or incorporate a buffer zone around a site that has been designated as a heritage site.
- c) The Director, in consultation with the Council, may determine the boundaries of the buffer zone and the central core.

A wide range of responsibilities are associated with a heritage site, as indicated by the clauses regarding the conservation area plan in both the Act and the Enactment. These responsibilities can significantly help protect the character and history of Kota Kinabalu's historic core and may also provide justification for the reconstruction, restoration, and rehabilitation of nearby structures that are not currently designated as Sabah State Heritage sites.

## **Methodology**

### ***Area of Study***

The area of study, Kota Kinabalu, is the capital city of Sabah, a Malaysian state located on the island of Borneo. It is situated at approximately 5°59'03"N latitude and 116°04'38"E longitude, with an elevation of 4 to 5 meters above sea level. The study area covers around 21.13 hectares and contains nine heritage landmarks within the historic core of Kota Kinabalu, all located in the city's Central Business District (CBD) (Figures 1-2 and Table 2). The British North Borneo Company established the city in 1899 after an adjacent village on Gaya Island was destroyed in 1897 by Mat Salleh, a local chieftain involved in a rebellion (North Borneo History Enthusiasts, 2020).

### ***Data Collection***

This study used a qualitative approach to collect and analyse data. Data on the historical significance of Kota Kinabalu's core was gathered through observations and expert interviews. These methods were chosen because they provided contextual, interpretative, and experiential insights into the heritage/cultural site. Observations allowed the researcher to directly examine the physical characteristics, spatial qualities, and conservation conditions of Kota Kinabalu's historic core. This method also helped identify elements that are not documented in official records, offering a first hand and grounded perspective on the site's current state. Additionally, expert interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth professional insights regarding the historical significance, management challenges, and conservation efforts associated with the heritage site. These expert perspectives enhance field observations by providing interpretive depth and technical validity to the study's findings.

Together, these methodologies collectively provide a thorough qualitative understanding of the heritage site by combining empirical observations of its tangible features with professional insights into its conservation, heritage, cultural, and managerial aspects. Furthermore, in line with the study's objective of evaluating the significance of the cultural and built heritages in this area, the goal is to propose a designated heritage core site along with its buffer zones.

### ***Site Observation***

A site observation was conducted to better understand the buildings, heritage, and physical condition of the area. Primary data were obtained by inspecting the heritage sites and evaluating indicators such as aesthetic value, informational value, and the unique integration of features. Observations of building typology were performed, and the land use of buildings within the study area was documented. This documentation involved taking notes and photographs, as well as creating maps of the core and buffer areas. The built heritage was categorized into groups, including shophouses, service buildings, institutional spaces, open areas, markets, and monuments, as illustrated in Figure 3.

**Table 1: Criteria designate National Heritages**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Heritage Criteria</b>
a)	the historical importance, association with, or relationship to Malaysian history;
b)	the good design or aesthetic characteristics;
c)	the scientific or technical innovations or achievements;
d)	the social or cultural associations;
e)	the potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Malaysian cultural heritage;
f)	the importance of exhibiting a richness, diversity, or unusual integration of features;
g)	the rarity or uniqueness of the natural heritage, tangible or intangible cultural heritage, or underwater cultural heritage;
h)	the representative nature of a site or object as part of a class or type of a site or object; and
i)	any other matter which is relevant to the determination of cultural heritage significance.

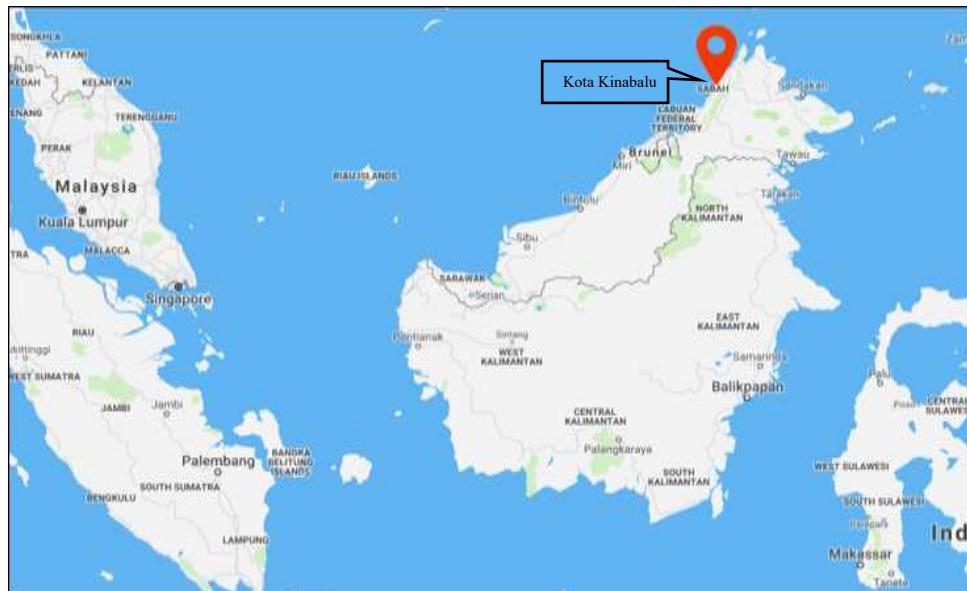


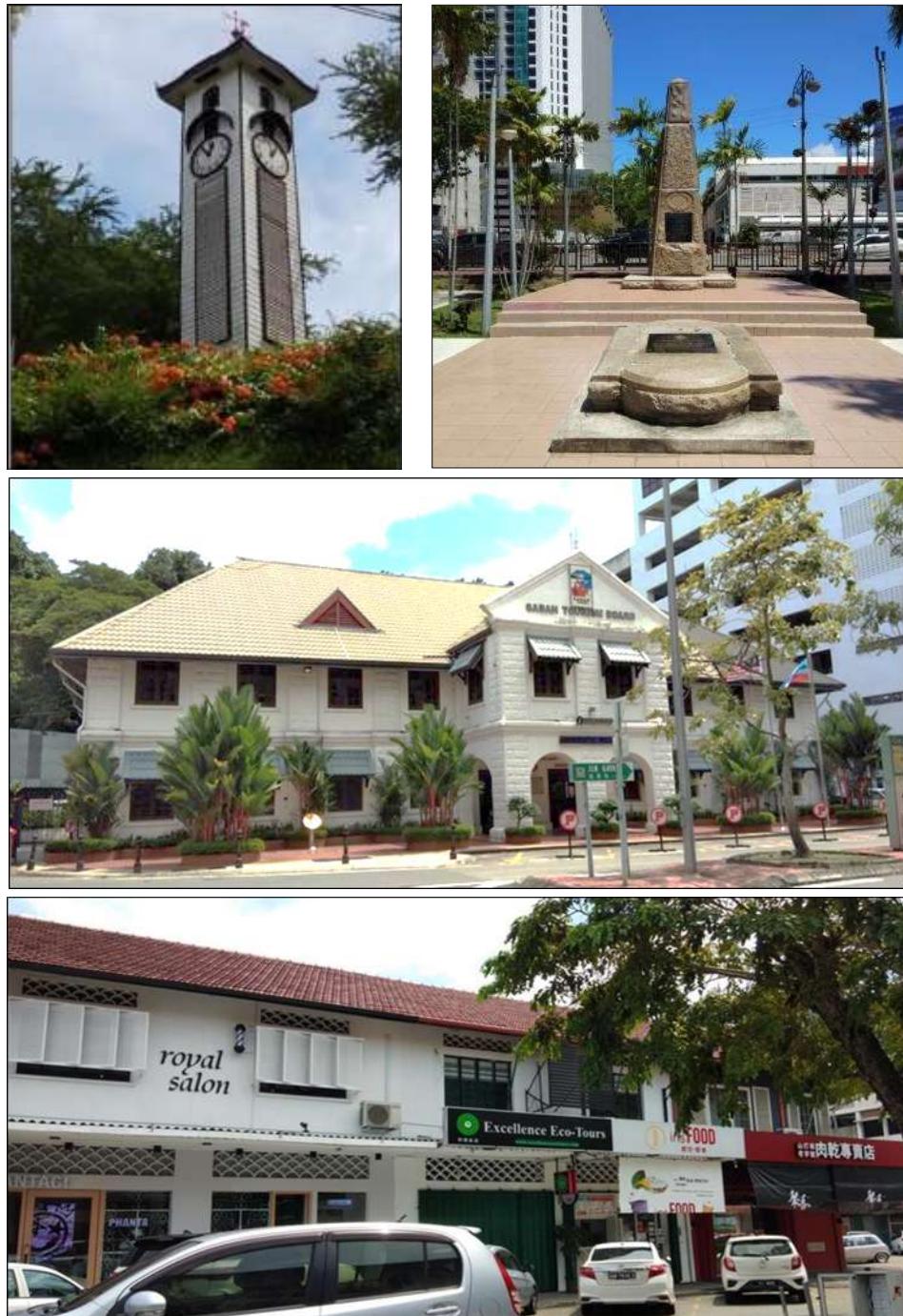
Figure 1: Key Plan of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia



Figure 2: Site Plan for The Core Zone (Red) With the Location of Nine Historic Landmarks in Kota Kinabalu

Table 2: List of the Kota Kinabalu Core Zone's Nine Historical Sites

No.	Landmark	Type
1.	Gaya Street	Business street
2.	Atkinson Clock Tower	Monument
3.	Padang Merdeka	Field / Square
4.	Lintasan Deasoka	Plaza / Open area
5.	North Borneo War Monument and City Park	Monument and Park
6.	Jesselton Hotel	Commercial Building
7.	Kota Kinabalu Community Hall	Institutional Building
8.	Sabah Tourism Board Building (The Old Post Office)	Institutional Building
9.	SAG Art Space (Old Land and Survey Building ruins)	Monument



**Figure 3: Examples Of Monument, Open Spaces, Services Building and Shophouses in the Colonial Era**

### ***Expert Interviews***

Expert interviews are conducted to obtain detailed insights from specialists regarding the conservation, management, and cultural significance of a heritage site. These interviews help validate findings and enhance the understanding of the site's context. A list of interviewees is provided in Table 3; they were selected for their professional knowledge and relevant experience. The open-ended questions focused on the significance of the historic core of Kota

Kinabalu. The evaluation of the area was based on several indicators and values: building typology, historical importance, social value and cultural associations, aesthetic value, informational value, and the richness, diversity, or unique integration of features. These indicators were applied in accordance with the standards outlined in Section 67 of the National Heritage Act of 2005 to assess the potential for designating the historic core as a heritage site.

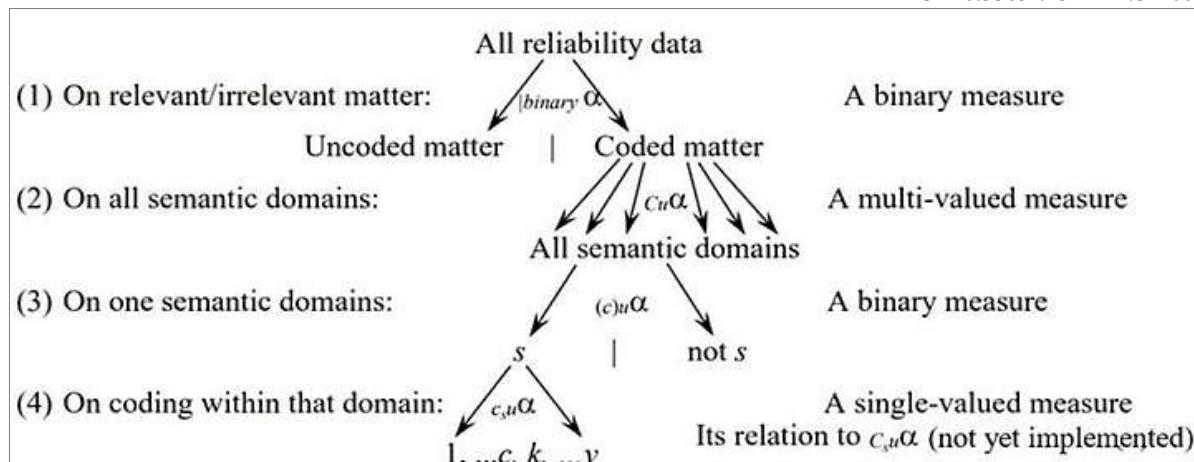
**Table 3: List of Interviewees for Expert Interview**

No.	Name	Position	Field	Experience
1	Interviewee A	Deputy Director, Sabah Museum	Heritage	27 years
2	Interviewee B	History Programme Lecturer, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)	Professor, Cultural Heritage Management	10 years
3	Interviewee C	Manager, Department of Built Environment and Monitoring, at George Town World Heritage Incorporated	Management and Tourism	19 years
4	Interviewee D	Contributing historian of 'From Jesselton to Kota Kinabalu: The Place –The People–Their Memories'	Historian and Advocate	15 years
5	Interviewee E	Senior Architect, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL)	Conservation & management	10 years

To evaluate the appropriateness of these indicators and values, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts (Table 3). The purpose of these interviews was to reach a consensus among the experts regarding the suitability of the indicators and values, determining whether they are suitable, unsuitable, or in need of refinement. The transcripts of the interviews were coded and categorized to identify common themes concerning the suitability of the indicators and values for designating a city's historic core.

### ***Data Analysis***

All collected data were analysed using descriptive methods and presented in figures, tables, and charts. The interviews were coded and analysed using ATLAS.ti version 22 software (Krippendorff, 2018). During the coding process, keywords from the transcripts were identified and categorized. These codes were organized into a Conceptual Model Network (CMN). Common themes emerged during the coding process, which were cross-analysed and refined to reach a consensus among the experts regarding the suitability of the study's indicators and values for designating the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a heritage site. Krippendorff's alpha is used as a coefficient family, provides various methods for calculating reliability at different levels. The formula illustrates a hierarchical structure of reliability data, likely based on Krippendorff's framework for measuring reliability in content analysis. It shows how various types of reliability coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) are applied based on coding levels and data characteristics (Krippendorff, 2018).



Where:

- o Alpha binary measures the agreement among coders regarding the relevance of texts for the research project
- o  $C_u\alpha$  indicates the level of agreement among coders regarding the presence or absence of semantic domains.
- o  $(c)u\alpha$  represents the extent to which coders recognize a specific semantic domain, denoted as  $s$ .

### ***Analysis of the Results***

The analysis of the results from qualitative approaches were divided into two as follows:

#### ***Site Observation***

The majority of building typology is not a strong indicator of significance for the historic core due to the degradation of its authenticity and integrity caused by modern developments. However, if the shophouses in the historic core can be restored to their original façade, this could enhance their significance as they represent modernist, Art Deco, and Chinese colonial eclectic architectural styles from the 1950s. Additionally, while the aesthetic value of the area is currently not a significant indicator, it could be improved through the restoration of the shophouses.

For the Federal Government to recognize the Kota Kinabalu Historic Core as a national heritage site, it may first need to achieve recognition as a Sabah State Heritage by the Sabah State Government. There are already several existing Sabah State Heritage sites within the historic core that can help strengthen the case for the designation of the historic core itself. Furthermore, the criteria for Sabah State Heritage under Section 55 of the Sabah Heritage Enactment 2017 are similar to those in the National Heritage Act 2005, meaning the same indicators of significance researched in this study can also be applied. However, to attain Sabah State Heritage recognition, preservation and restoration efforts within the historic core are essential, along with increased public awareness and participation in these activities. Although the path toward National Heritage designation for the Kota Kinabalu Historic Core shows great potential, it is obstructed by several challenges that need to be addressed first.

### ***Authenticity and Integrity of the Site***

Authenticity and integrity are essential for a heritage site. According to Denyer (2011), authenticity connects a heritage site's attributes to its Outstanding Universal Value, or to the criteria outlined in the National Heritage Act 2005, particularly in the context of the Kota Kinabalu historic core. Integrity, on the other hand, refers to the completeness or intactness of these heritage attributes. Within the historic core, the Old Post Office, Atkinson Clock Tower, and the North Borneo War Monument are pre-war structures that have retained both their authenticity and integrity. These buildings are well-maintained, and their colonial-era façades remain intact. In contrast, the shophouses in the historic core have undergone numerous modern developments that have diluted or destroyed their colonial-era façades, leading to a loss of urban cohesion. Consequently, both the authenticity and integrity of these shophouses and the overall fabric of the historic core have been significantly diminished.

### ***Awareness of the Local Community***

There is a noticeable lack of awareness among the local community and businesses regarding the importance of protecting the historic core of Kota Kinabalu. This is particularly evident in the degradation of the façades of shophouses on Gaya Street, where some have completely lost their original façade due to renovations. Even Sabah State Heritage sites are not exempt from the pressures of modern development and the loss of character. The Atkinson Clock Tower, which was completed in 1905 and is Kota Kinabalu's oldest structure, has faced significant controversy over development in its vicinity. The first major issue arose in 2010 when Kota Kinabalu City Hall approved the construction of a high-rise building complex adjacent to the clock tower. This decision sparked public outcry and ultimately led to the cancellation of the development (The Borneo Post, 2011). A second controversy emerged in 2021 concerning a planned landscape upgrade for the clock tower's area. A local conservator criticized the upgrade, describing it as "stone cold" due to the excessive use of concrete and the absence of trees in the new design (The Borneo Post, 2021). The conservator also expressed concern that City Hall did not consult the public prior to approving the project.

In summary, the historic core of Kota Kinabalu demonstrates several potential significances based on the six indicators assessed in this study. Among these indicators, four are particularly suitable for designating the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a national heritage site: historical importance, social and cultural associations, informational values, and the richness, diversity, or unusual integration of features. However, the indicators of building typology and aesthetic value are not currently appropriate for designation due to the loss of integrity and authenticity observed within the historic core, particularly in the shophouses. Historical importance and social and cultural associations stand out as particularly strong indicators of significance for the Kota Kinabalu historic core. This small area is rich in history related to Sabah and Malaysia, and it also reflects the vibrant culture of the people of Sabah, especially evident in the Gaya Street Tamu. Therefore, any efforts to designate the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a heritage site, whether at the state or national level, have a compelling foundation. Nonetheless, challenges must be addressed, particularly concerning authenticity, integrity, and awareness of the historic core. If these challenges are not overcome, the Kota Kinabalu historic core risks further degradation of its authenticity, integrity, and overall character.

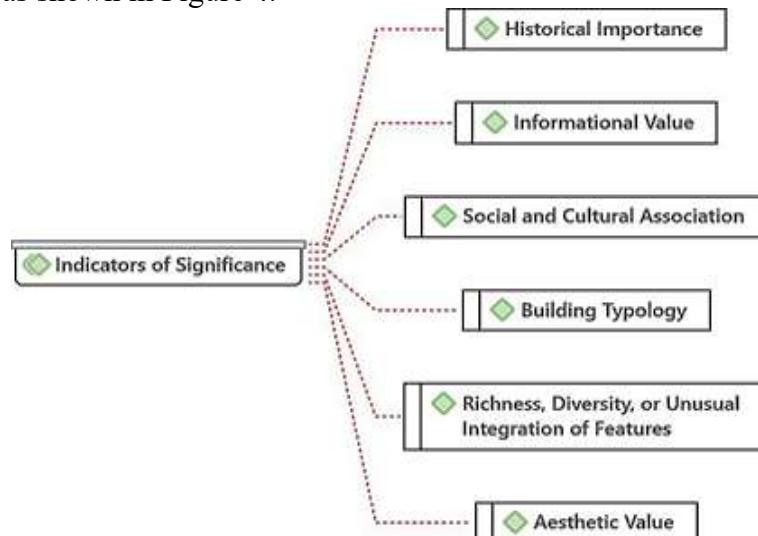
### ***Expert Knowledge-Based Interviews***

Based on the primary and secondary data the researcher had collected, the experts' opinions from the interviews, and the analysis of the six indicators and values, a statement of the historic

core's significance was created, as was a proposal for rules designating the city's historic cores as heritage sites.

### Values of Significance in a Core Zone

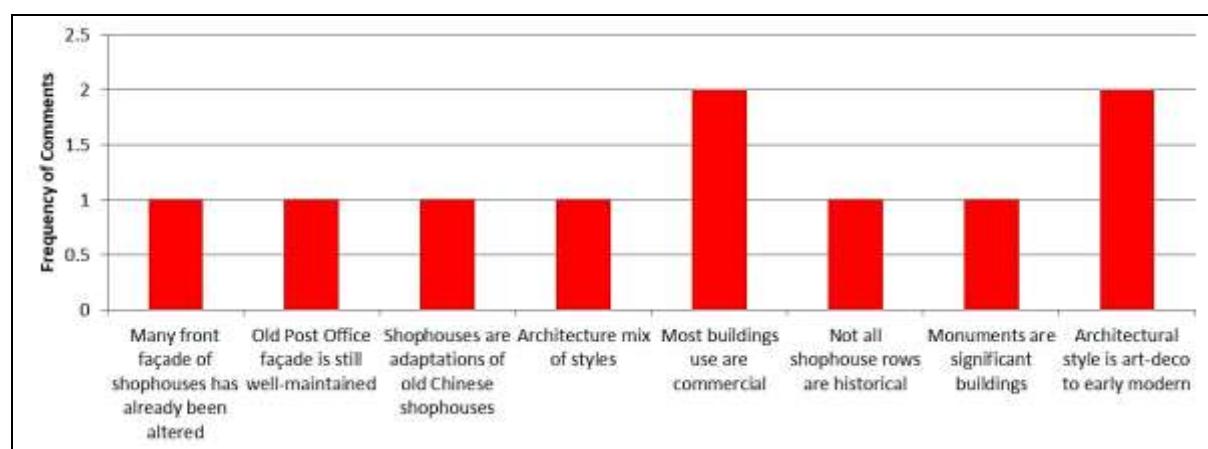
Five experts were asked the following questions to ascertain the significance of the Kota Kinabalu historic core and whether the six indicators utilised in this study are appropriate for the historic core as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: The Conceptual Model Network (CMN) includes six key indicators for designating the historic core of Kota Kinabalu as a National Heritage site**

### Building Typology

Building typology classifies buildings based on their qualitative, quantitative, morphological, and functional attributes (Darvill, 2008). Building typology, specifically by form, identifies a city's changes and history. According to Moudon (1986), a change in the type of building typology can tell a city's cultural, economic, and architectural history.



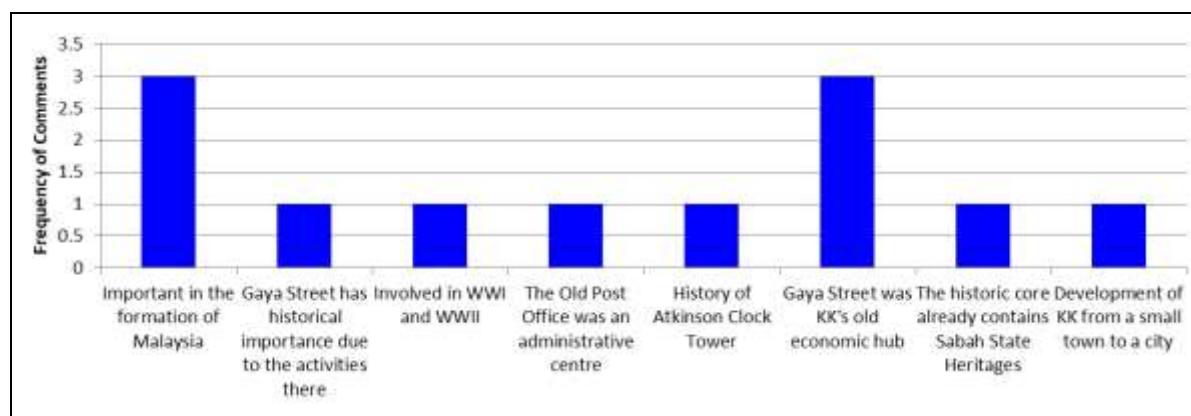
**Figure 5: Expert opinions and comments on Building Typology**

The comments are summarized in Figure 5. Notably, the majority of the experts interviewed—60%—agreed that building typology is a valid indicator for designating the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a national heritage site. Those who supported this viewpoint cited the presence

of existing pre-war structures and monuments in the historic core as their rationale for why building typology is appropriate. In contrast, the 40% of experts who disagreed argued that the modifications made to the facades of the shophouses have led to a loss of authenticity and integrity. They also felt that the commercial use of the buildings does not provide a sufficient basis to consider building typology an indicator of significance for the historic core.

### ***Historical Importance***

Heritage sites act as a connection between a community's past and present. They often represent or have played a role in a country's social, economic, cultural, or military history (Hashim, 2017). The National Heritage Act 2005 and the Sabah Heritage Enactment 2017 identify historical significance as the primary criterion for designating a heritage site in relation to the histories of Malaysia and Sabah.



**Figure 6: Expert Commentary on Historical Significance**

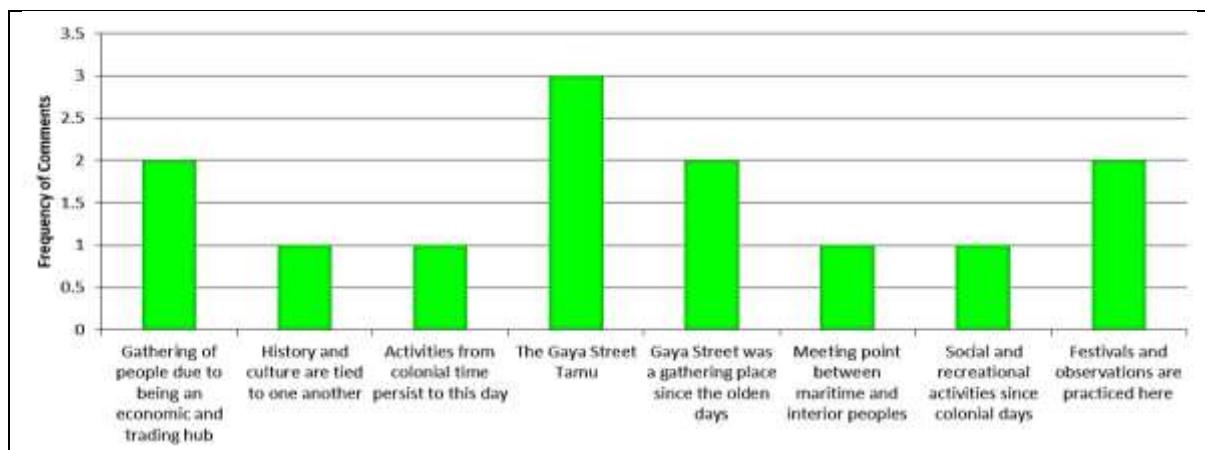
All the experts agreed that historical relevance is a key indicator of value that justifies the classification of the Kota Kinabalu Historic Core as a National Heritage Site. Many reasons contributed to this consensus, with most experts highlighting the historic core's significance in the formation of Malaysia and its past role as the economic hub of Kota Kinabalu (Figure 6). Notably, one of the first meetings regarding the formation of Malaysia took place at what is now the Kota Kinabalu Community Hall. Additionally, Padang Merdeka is where Sabah officially agreed to join Malaysia on September 16, 1963. As illustrated in Figure 4, historical importance emerged as a universally recognized indicator of significance among all the experts interviewed. This consensus is rooted in the rich history of the Kota Kinabalu Historic Core and the diverse stories it can convey.

### ***Social Value and Cultural Association***

The collective attachment to a location that holds meanings and values significant to a community is referred to as social value (Jones, 2017). This encompasses elements such as social capital, symbolic significance, spiritual connections, attachment to the area, and group identity. One of the criteria for historic classification under the National Historic Act of 2005 and the Sabah Heritage Enactment of 2017 is social and cultural association.

Social and cultural association serves as an indicator of significance agreed upon by all five experts interviewed. As shown in Figure 7, a common point noted by the experts is the role of the historic core, particularly through Gaya Street Tamu, in bringing people together for interaction and engagement. Three experts specifically highlighted the importance of Gaya

Street Tamu in the social and cultural association of the Kota Kinabalu historic core. A Tamu is a traditional Sabahan open market that provides a venue for various people to buy and sell produce and products. This gathering place is socially significant for fostering community connections and culturally important as it represents a traditional Sabahan custom.

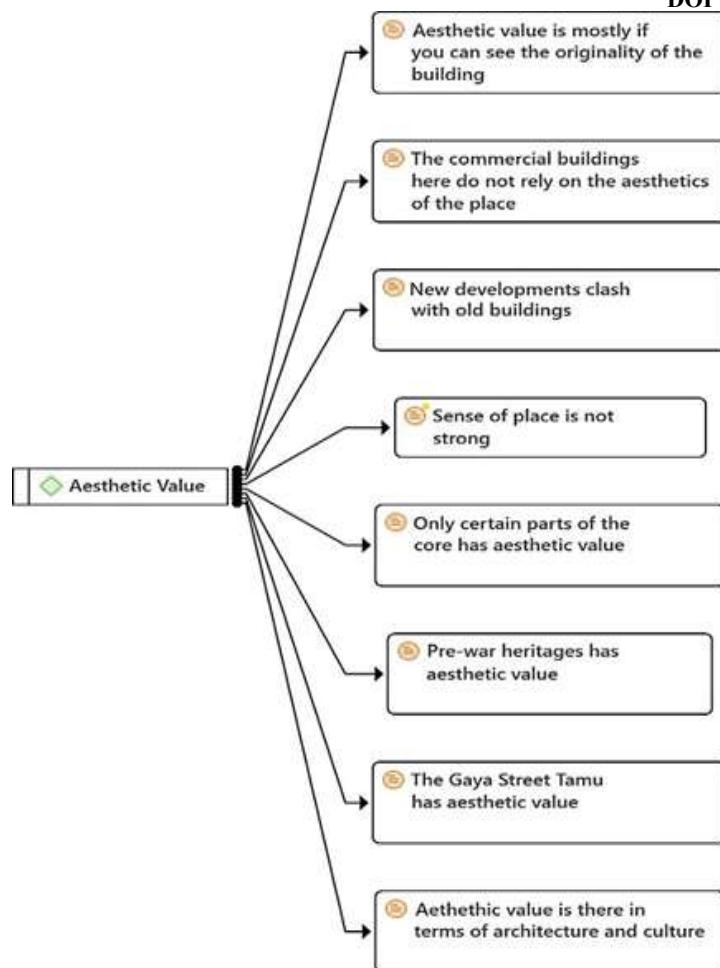


**Figure 7: Expert Opinion and Comments on Social and Cultural Association for The Kota Kinabalu Historic Core**

Comments from the expert interviews highlight that the location serves as a gathering point, with economic and trading activities bringing people together. This observation is supported by the historical significance of Gaya Street (and the streets that preceded it) as an economic hub since the founding of Kota Kinabalu, well before the establishment of the Gaya Street Tamu in 1984. One expert noted that, in the past, Padang Merdeka acted as a recreational ground during colonial times. Overall, it is clear that social and cultural associations are vital indicators for designating the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a national heritage site. The strong social and cultural ties within the historic core have been unanimously recognized by all five experts.

### ***Aesthetic Value***

According to Plato and Meskin (2014), an object, event, or circumstance possesses aesthetic worth if it has the potential to evoke feelings of pleasure or annoyance in viewers when experienced aesthetically. Additionally, Elwazani (2021) argued that aesthetic value can be assessed through parameters such as scale, style, and colour, as well as its coherence and harmony with its surroundings. Aesthetic value is recognized as the second criterion for heritage declaration in both the National Heritage Act of 2005 and the Sabah Heritage Enactment of 2017, categorized as criterion (b), which addresses good design and aesthetic characteristics.

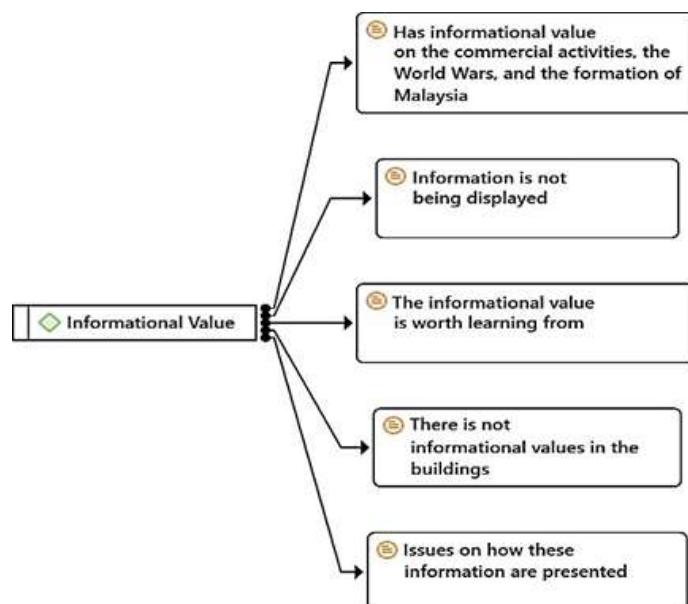


**Figure 8: The CMN of the Indicator of Aesthetic Value**

The majority of experts surveyed (80%) agreed that aesthetic value is a vital indicator of significance for classifying the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a national heritage site (Figure 8). They pointed to either the pre-war structures or Gaya Street Tamu as evidence of the historic core's aesthetic value. One expert also noted that the architecture and cultural elements present in the area contribute to this value. However, one expert disagreed, arguing that this indicator is not suitable for the Kota Kinabalu historic core due to its weak sense of place. This expert highlighted that new developments clash with the older buildings, and the architectural styles within the historic core do not harmonize with their commercial use. Achieving a consensus on aesthetic value among the experts proved challenging. Even among those who supported the indicator, one expert conceded that only certain parts of the historic core possess aesthetic value.

#### ***Heritage Informational Value***

The preservation of heritage sites is crucial for both public education and scholarly research (Costin, 1993). Such sites play an important role in fostering a sense of duty towards conservation among the younger generation, as early visits can instil values related to heritage and preservation. The National Heritage Act of 2005 and the Sabah Heritage Enactment of 2017 both include criteria (e) that focus on the ability to educate, demonstrate, or advance scientific research on Malaysian and Sabah cultural heritage. Informational value falls within this category.

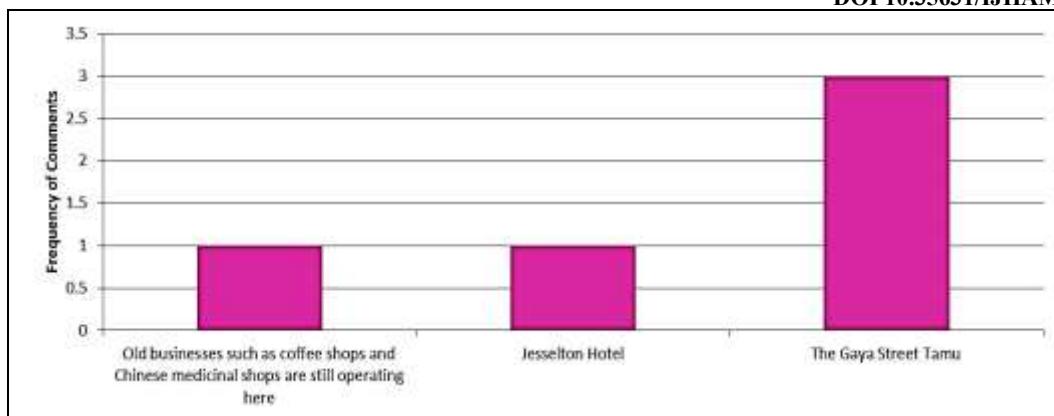


**Figure 9: The CMN of the Indicator of Informational Value**

In Figure 9, the informational value is not universally accepted as a significant indicator by all the experts consulted. Three out of five experts (60%) agreed that this indicator is appropriate for designating the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a national heritage site. They highlighted the historical importance of the area in relation to Malaysia's formation, its role in World War II (and to a lesser extent, World War I), and its commercial activities as worthy of study. However, the experts who disagreed argued that even when this information is available, it must be presented effectively; thus, they do not consider informational value a suitable indicator. Overall, experts highlighted both the potential and problems of the informational value within the Kota Kinabalu historic core. Although this information is rich and relevant, it needs to be presented and made known to the wider public.

#### ***Richness, Diversity, or Unusual Integration of Features***

The monotonous and homogenous appearance of these buildings' risks clashing with the older structures, thereby harming the fabric of the city's historic environment (Shamsuddin & Sulaiman, 2002). According to Hashim (2017), there are five interpretations of this criterion: (1) These interpretations relate to the conservation of urban environments or areas, aiming to characterize a collection of buildings that exhibit various cultural influences or typologies. (2) They reflect the diversity of cultures that comprise Malaysia's population. (3) Certain communities feature rich and varied ornamentation in their building types. (4) A building typology can encompass a wide range of styles. (5) This criterion applies to complexes that consist of various building types.



**Figure 10: Expert Opinions and Comments on Richness, Diversity, or Unusual Integration of Features**

The richness, diversity, and unusual integration of features serve as a significant indicator, which 60% of the experts interviewed agreed is suitable for evaluation. Two experts expressed uncertainty regarding its inclusion. One expert, who was not a native of Kota Kinabalu, felt unsure and therefore lacked the expertise to accurately assess this indicator. The other expert, a native of Kota Kinabalu, was sceptical about the indicator's relevance, as he believed it was not strongly evident. However, he did acknowledge that the Gaya Street Tamu could be considered an example related to this indicator (Figure 10). The other experts who recognized the existence of this indicator pointed to the Gaya Street Tamu as a key reason for the area's richness, diversity, and unusual integration of features within the historic core of Kota Kinabalu. The Tamu tradition is typically associated with villages and rural townships, making its presence in a city like Kota Kinabalu noteworthy. Gaya Street still features old businesses, including traditional coffee shops and Chinese medicine stores, as well as the historic Jesselton Hotel. Experts also noted that this hotel, which opened at the end of Sabah's colonial era, attempted to reflect a British colonial aesthetic in its design.

## Discussion

### *Assessing The Significance of The Cultural and Built Heritages Within the Kota Kinabalu Historic Core*

The significance of the Kota Kinabalu historic core was assessed based on six indicators through literature reviews, expert interviews, and on-site observations. It was found that two key indicators remain prominent in the historic core, particularly through the pre-war heritage of the city. The significances associated with the historic core are diverse, but its historical importance, along with its social and cultural associations, are particularly noteworthy. However, the authenticity and integrity of the Kota Kinabalu historic core have been significantly compromised due to modern developments. For example, renovations to the Gaya Street shophouses have resulted in the loss of their colonial-era façades.

Observations indicate that most buildings in the historic core serve commercial purposes, with a smaller number serving institutional functions. Some shophouses exhibit Chinese-Colonial Eclectic architecture, while others display a blend of Art Deco and Modernist styles. The presence of Art Deco and Modernist architecture has been confirmed through literature reviews. On-site observations have also revealed that the authenticity and integrity of the built

heritage in the historic core are at risk, as modern developments continue to modify or destroy the façades of the older shophouses.

***Proposing An Area to Be Gazetted as A Heritage Core Site and Its Buffer Zone Areas***

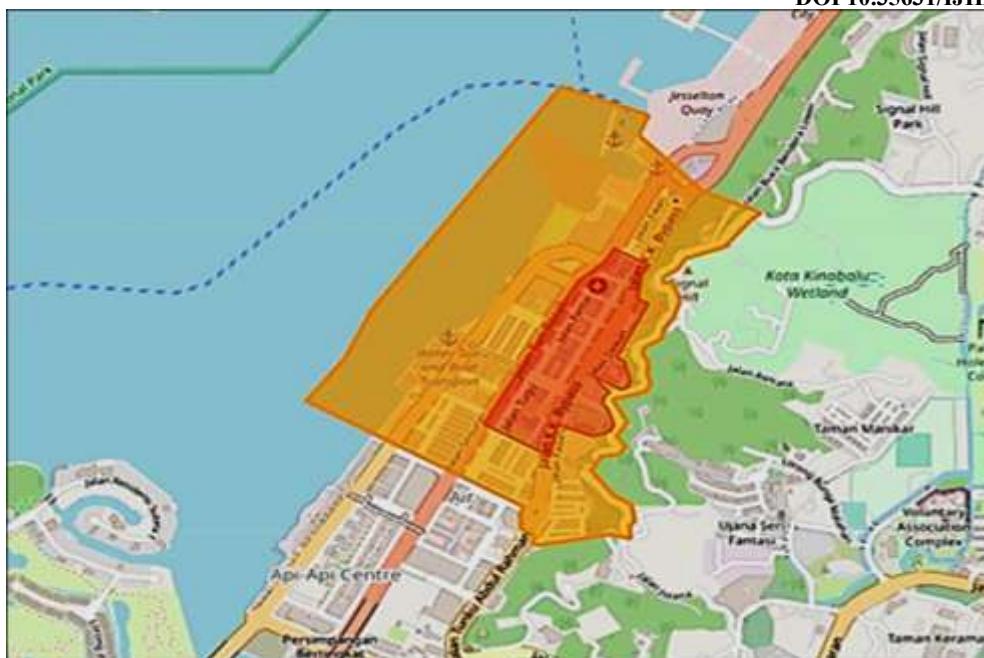
A proposal for the core and buffer zones of a hypothetical Kota Kinabalu historic core heritage site can be developed based on the results of on-site observations and expert interviews. It is recommended that the core zone encompass an area as roughly outlined in Figures 11a and 11b and the five areas within the buffer zones are listed in Table 4. This zone is bordered to the west by Jalan Tun Razak, to the south by Jalan Kampung Air 1, to the north by Jalan Kota Kinabalu Lama 6, and to the east by Signal Hill (Bukit Bendera). This 21-hectare area includes the entire Kota Kinabalu old town, where all prominent Sabah state heritage sites and other significant landmarks are located within this zone.

**Table 4: List of Five Areas Within the Buffer Zones of Kota Kinabalu Core in Figure 11a**

No.	Area	Type
1.	Core Zone	Kota Kinabalu Core
2.	Segama	Commercial areas and Hotels
3.	Sinsuran	Handicraft Market, Fruit Market, Anjung Samudera, and the KK Esplanade
4.	Kampung Air	Water Village are villages on stilts in Kota Kinabalu
5.	Bandaran Berjaya	Commercial areas and residential
6.	Jesselton Point	Ferry terminal, the main entrance to Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park



**Figure 11a: Key Commercial and Business Areas in The Buffer Zones of Kota Kinabalu Core**



**Figure 11b: The Recommended Buffer Zones (In Yellow) Around the Core Zone (In Red) Extend Approximately 230 Meters into The Sea for The Kota Kinabalu Historic Core**

The Kota Kinabalu Historic Core has been enhanced with the establishment of buffer zones. These buffer zones may impose legal restrictions on resource usage, generally to a lesser extent than in the adjacent protected areas, thereby creating a transitional space. The proposed buffer zone covers an area of approximately 135 hectares and incorporates commercial districts and Signal Hill to serve as a buffer for the core zone. It also includes notable landmarks in Kota Kinabalu, such as the Kota Kinabalu Handicraft Market (also known as the Filipino Market) and Jesselton Point, which is Kota Kinabalu's ferry terminal and cruise port (Figure 11b). Additionally, there is a possibility for the buffer zone to be designated as a protected area. According to Hijas (2022), the buffer zone extends roughly 230 metres into the sea to prevent land reclamation activities in that region.

### Conclusion

The majority of the five experts consulted regarding the validity of the indicators for designating the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a historical site agreed on all six indicators. These indicators are significant enough to qualify the Kota Kinabalu historic core as a National Heritage site. The building typology of the historic core reflects the commercial and institutional functions of the city and showcases its diverse architectural styles throughout Kota Kinabalu's over 120-year history. However, the authenticity and integrity of this building typology have deteriorated due to poor management of modern developments within the historic core. The area holds historical significance, as it played vital roles in Malaysia's formation, in Sabah's history during the World Wars, and in the transformation of Kota Kinabalu from a colonial outpost to a modern city. Additionally, the historic core is associated with various social and cultural customs, such as the Gaya Street Tamu, celebrations like Malaysia Day and ANZAC Day, and its long-standing role as a gathering point since colonial times. The aesthetic value of the historic core is derived from its pre-war heritage and the various architectural styles of its shophouses. However, this aesthetic value has suffered

significantly due to the loss of authenticity and integrity caused by modern developments. The historical core's value as an informational resource stems from its roles in Malaysia's formation and Kota Kinabalu's development, although enhancing the presentation of this information is essential. Richness, diversity, and unique features characterize the Gaya Street Tamu. Most experts also agree that these six indicators could be applied to other Malaysian cities seeking national heritage designation for their historic cores.

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