

The History of Samalona Island: From the Colonial Period to the Tourism Era

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Abstract

This study aims to trace the historical development of Samalona Island from the colonial period to the tourism era. The researchers employed a historical method with a qualitative approach. The findings highlight several important aspects of Samalona Island's role in South Sulawesi's history. First, its strategic location in the Makassar Strait served as a vital trade route connecting South Sulawesi with other regions of Nusantara (present-day Indonesia). This geographic location made the island a key point for trade and maritime navigation from the colonial period to the present. Second, the island played a role in defense and security, given its position in waters frequently contested by local powers and colonial forces. Samalona Island once served as a defense and security base for the kingdoms of South Sulawesi, particularly the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom. The island played a crucial role in protecting this kingdom from enemy attacks and other threats. When the Dutch East India Company (VOC) rose to power, Samalona shifted into an observation post and a Dutch maritime patrol base. Colonial control over the Makassar seas restricted local communities from accessing Samalona. Third, beyond its defensive function, Samalona also became an important fishing center for the people of Gowa and Makassar. After Indonesia's independence, the island gradually transformed into a tourist destination. The historical trajectory of Samalona reflects spatial contestations, unequal access, ecological exploitation, and strategies for preserving maritime tourism. By highlighting the relationship between humans and the sea as a cultural dimension, this article argues for repositioning Samalona within history-based preservation policies and spatial justice frameworks.

Keywords: Coastal space, colonialism, marine tourism, maritime history, preservation.



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INTRODUCTION

Samalona Island is one of the small islands within the Spermonde Archipelago, located in the Makassar Strait, and geographically positioned near Makassar City-historically recognized as major maritime trading hub since the colonial period. This strategic location places Samalona not merely as an ecological space but as an integral part of maritime networks, including trade routes, navigation systems, and socio-cultural interactions in Eastern Indonesia.

From maritime historical perspective, small islands such as Samalona functioned as transit points, nodes of cultural exchange, and economic linkages within regional trading systems. However, contemporary studies on Samalona Island have largely focused on tourism development, community-based management, and economic aspects of maritime tourism (Malik et al., 2025; Nurdin, 2014). This indicates that the historical dimension-particularly its role in maritime networks from the colonial era to its transformation into a tourism destination remains underexplored.

Historically, coastal areas and small islands in South Sulawesi played a significant role in international trade networks, especially from the 17th century onward (Sulistiyono & Rochwulaningsih, 2013; Zuhdi, 2018). Maritime mobility, commodity distribution, and human migration shaped the socio-economic dynamics of local communities. Therefore, examining Samalona Island is crucial to understanding how maritime spaces have transformed over time and how these transformations have influenced local socio-economic structures.

Existing studies on Samalona Island reveal several key tendencies: Dominance of tourism-oriented studies; Most research emphasizes tourism development strategies, stakeholder roles, and local economic impacts rather than historical analysis (Arifin et al., 2024); Limited-micro-level maritime historical studies; Maritime history in Indonesia tends to focus on major ports such as Makassar (Ridhwan, 2023), Batavia (Taum et al., 2025), or Malacca (Gin, 2022; Saiffuddin et al., 2025), while small islands like Samalona remain understudied; Lack of longitudinal analysis. There is scarcity of research tracing the transformation of Samalona Island from the colonial period through post-colonial transitions to the modern tourism era.

This study presents several novel contributions. First, it adopts a micro-maritime historical approach, positioning Samalona Island as a unit of analysis through which broader maritime dynamics can be understood at the local level. Adopting a diachronic, or *longue durée*, perspective, the study traces transformations across four key phases: the colonial maritime function, transitional socio-economic changes, contemporary tourism development, and the integration of historical and tourism studies. In doing so, it bridges historical narratives with modern tourism development, highlighting a fundamental shift in maritime space from production-oriented to consumption-oriented functions.

The research enriches Indonesian maritime historiography, particularly at the micro or small-island level. It offers a new lens through which to view the transformation of maritime spaces into tourism economies. On a practical level, the study serves as a reference for policymakers seeking to develop historically grounded tourism strategies and supports sustainable tourism planning by integrating historical values. Culturally, it strengthens local identity as part of

Makassar's maritime heritage and promotes historical awareness in both tourism management and community development.

METHOD

This study employs a historical research method with a qualitative approach. The research follows the standard procedures of historical inquiry, including heuristics (data collection), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Data were collected from various sources, including literature reviews, colonial archives, interviews with local informants, and field observations. Primary sources include colonial records and oral histories, while secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and previous research on maritime history and tourism development.

The analysis of qualitative data was conducted through source criticism, both external and internal, to evaluate the authenticity and credibility of historical sources. Furthermore, narrative interpretation was applied to reconstruct the historical transformation of Samalona Island from the colonial period to the contemporary tourism era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Samalona in A Colonial Context

Samalona Island occupied a strategic position along the colonial shipping route between Makassar and the surrounding islands. Since the 17th century, the island has formed part of the maritime defenses of the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom before falling to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) under the Treaty of Bongaya in 1667. Dutch military maps from the early 20th century marked Samalona as a lookout post and fleet stopover (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

During World War II, the Japanese also used the island as a maritime surveillance point, leaving behind several structures that later deteriorated. This continued military function underscores Samalona's importance in monitoring and controlling the waters of Makassar Bay (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

As part of the Spermonde Archipelago off the west coast of South Sulawesi, Samalona has long held a pivotal role in the maritime landscape of Nusantara (a historical term referring to present-day Indonesia). Its location along international shipping routes (particularly those linking the Banda Sea, the Makassar Strait, and the Java Sea) gave the island ecological value as well as military and political significance throughout the colonial era.

Pre-Colonial: Samalona and The Gowa-Tallo Defense System

Before colonial domination, the waters of the Spermonde Archipelago, including Samalona, lay within the sphere of influence of the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom. Historian Reid (2015) notes that Gowa-Tallo established a maritime defense system through a network of forts and observation posts on small islands surrounding Makassar to control trade and regulate maritime traffic. Although Samalona was smaller than key islands such as Barrang Lompo or Kodingareng, its position directly in front of Makassar City gave it natural advantages for observing foreign vessels approaching the port. The Gowa-Tallo Kingdom extended its hegemony across the coastal

and island areas surrounding Makassar, incorporating small islands such as Samalona, Barrang Caddi, and Kodingareng. These islands functioned as sea watch points and as logistical support stations for the kingdom's naval fleet (Aulia, 2025).

In the Gowa-Tallo political structure, maritime defense and control of trade routes were primary concerns due to the kingdom's strategic position between the Makassar Strait and the Flores Sea. Small islands such as Samalona formed part of the maritime surveillance and defense system, especially in monitoring shipping activities, collecting tribute from conquered areas, and providing early warnings of enemy attacks (Nurdin, 2014). Although archaeologists have not yet fully uncovered evidence of defense facilities on Samalona, the kingdom's geostrategic approach highlights the importance of these islands in its military and economic framework.

The Gowa-Tallo Kingdom organized a naval fleet-based navigation and defense system known as padewakang and pa'jala. The padewakang and pajala are two traditional boats of South Sulawesi, particularly among the Makassarese. The Padewakang, a large sailing vessel, historically served multiple purposes: long-distance trade (transporting goods within and beyond Sulawesi), sea voyages, recreation, sailing competitions, and inter-island transportation. In contrast, the pajala is a smaller fishing boat, primarily used by fishermen to catch fish with nets and as transport to offshore fishing grounds. Both vessels hold enduring significance in the maritime life of South Sulawesi, not only as tools of economic exchange and sea transport but also as symbols of the region's maritime heritage. The vessels supported not only trade but also maritime patrols. Small islands like Samalona served as transit posts and surveillance points, particularly because of their proximity to Gowa-Tallo's political center on the west coast of Makassar (Amalyah et al., 2016).



Figure 1. Samalona Island in the Makassar Strait, 2 kilometers from Losari Beach, Makassar City. Source: Badollahi, *Pulau Samalona dalam Sejarah [Samalona Island in History]*, Kompasiana, July 17, 2025.

Beyond its military role, Samalona also contributed to the economy through its role in the distribution network for marine products and as a stopover for fishermen and traders affiliated with the kingdom. The Lontarak Bilang (the official chronicle of the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom) records that the waters and small islands around Makassar formed part of the pabbateang (areas supervised by seafaring nobles). This designation reflects the symbolic authority and economic control the kingdom exerted over its maritime domain (Syamsuri et al., 2018).

The conflict between the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom and the colonial powers (particularly the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and its ally, the Bone Kingdom) made maritime defense even more crucial (Hadrawi et al., 2022). After the Makassar War (1666–1669) and the signing of the Treaty of Bongaya in 1667, Gowa-Tallo's power declined sharply. Its control over maritime territories, including Samalona, weakened, creating opportunities for Dutch colonial domination in the region. Before Dutch colonial rule, however, Samalona was not a passive, peripheral island. Instead, it formed part of Gowa-Tallo's broader geopolitical and military strategy to control waters and safeguard vital shipping lanes across the eastern Nusantara.

Samalona as A Military Strategic Point

Samalona's geographical location on the shipping route leading to the port of Makassar made the island strategically significant. A 17th-century Dutch document notes that Gowa-Tallo maintained a maritime patrol system that included small islands near the coastline armed with soldiers and guard boats (Arif, 2019). Given its proximity to Gowa-Tallo's main coastal defense line, Samalona was likely part of this network.

The island functioned not only as a royal military outpost but also as a lookout post against pirates and foreign powers, particularly the Portuguese and Dutch, who began entering Makassar waters in the second half of the 16th century. Historical evidence indicates that the Gowa-Tallo kingdom developed fortifications and a maritime surveillance system highly adapted to local geography, with small islands forming part of the kingdom's perimeter intelligence network to sustain maritime dominance.

Resource and Population Management in Samalona

Although Samalona Island had a small population at the time, Gowa-Tallo integrated smaller islands into its political and economic structure. Islands like Samalona became part of the dependent territories, or land of karaeng, administered by the Gowa-Tallo nobility. Within this framework, the island served as a collection point for marine products such as fish, shellfish, and sea cucumbers, which traders then transported to markets in Makassar (Mulsi & Jiuhardi, 2023).

This pattern shows that Gowa-Tallo developed a maritime administrative system that extended even to geographically remote areas. The practice aligned with the broader maritime trade and shipping system, which formed the backbone of Gowa-Tallo's economy at the time. Thus, although less prominent than Somba Opu Fort or Tallo Harbor, Samalona played a crucial role as a small but vital node in the kingdom's maritime defense and economic network.

Military Resistance and Opposition to European Expansion

At the height of the conflict between the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) (1610–1669), Samalona and the surrounding small islands likely functioned as transit points and logistics stations for the Gowa-Tallo fleet (Andaya, 1981). Sultan Hasanuddin's defense strategy emphasized flexible naval resistance based on a network of islands, as seen in the battles in Makassar Bay (Prakasa et al., 2023). The Gowa-Tallo navy, renowned for its speed and agility, probably relied on Samalona and nearby islands to mobilize small boats known as *banawa*.

Although VOC records do not explicitly mention Samalona as a battle site, its geographical position suggests it served as a potential transit point and hiding place for small fleets confronting larger VOC ships. This defense system eventually collapsed after the fall of Somba Opu Fort and the signing of the Treaty of Bongaya in 1667, which ended Gowa-Tallo's dominance in coastal regions, including the islands of Samalona.

VOC Colonization and the Bongaya Agreement

The 1667 Treaty of Bongaya marked a major turning point in control over South Sulawesi's coastal areas. After Gowa-Tallo's defeat, the VOC consolidated its power and restructured shipping and defense systems. Within this new framework, Samalona was included in the VOC's maritime strategy as a key point for monitoring shipping in Makassar Bay (U.S. Naval Intelligence, 1946). Although the VOC did not build a major fort on Samalona, shipping records mention the island as a navigational reference and a transit point for merchant and military vessels (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

The Dutch East Indies Period: A Strategic Island in the Military Network

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Dutch colonial government expanded its control over coastal and maritime areas to secure trade routes and suppress piracy. Within this framework, Samalona Island served as a maritime monitoring post. Records from the 1921 Koloniaal Verslag describe maritime mapping and surveillance activities conducted by the colonial navy in the Spermonde Archipelago, including operations from small islands such as Lae-Lae, Barrang Caddi, and Samalona.

Dutch navigational charts also identify Samalona as an important coordinate point within the shipping system of merchant and military vessels (KITLV, Leiden Maps Archive). These records reveal that, despite its small size, Samalona played a role in the Dutch colonial system of sea-lane control and management.

Following the dissolution of the VOC in 1799, when all assets were transferred to the Dutch East Indies government, the military and maritime surveillance structures in the eastern Nusantara, including South Sulawesi, were reorganized. The Dutch colonial administration established a more centralized and systematic defense system to counter potential local uprisings and external threats from foreign powers such as Britain and Spain, which remained active in Southeast Asia until the mid-19th century (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

Within this strategic framework, Samalona functioned as part of a buffer zone supporting the defense of Makassar's port. Its position at the mouth of the bay made it an ideal observation point for maritime activity. The Dutch recognized the strategic importance of controlling small islands like Samalona to strengthen surveillance of key waterways and to prevent infiltration by enemy vessels or pirates.

Samalona in Coastal Defense Architecture

By the mid-19th century, the Dutch colonial government strengthened the fortification system along the South Sulawesi coast. Fort Rotterdam served as the main defense center, but maritime surveillance extended beyond land-based fortifications. Small islands such as Kayangan, Lae-Lae, and Samalona functioned as satellite outposts to detect the movement of enemy ships, both commercial and military (Singh & T. Easow, 2023).

Archival sources from the *Algemeen Rijksarchief* show that in the 1860s, regular sea patrols circled the island group near Makassar, including Samalona, to inspect vessels and curb rampant smuggling (VOC Archief, inv. nr. 12456). Reports indicate that Samalona also served as a temporary stopover for small fleets and patrol boats monitoring the waters of the archipelago.

Strategically located in the Makassar Strait and close to Makassar's city center, Samalona belonged to a cluster of small islands with high strategic value during the colonial era. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, the Makassar Strait acted as a major shipping corridor between eastern and western Nusantara, and as a vital link in the spice trade and other maritime commodity routes (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

Samalona's role remained inseparable from its function as a monitoring site, surveillance point, and profitable stopover for merchant and military vessels, particularly those of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Despite its small size, the island became an integral part of the Dutch maritime control system, overseeing ship movements and securing trade routes to and from Makassar, which at the time ranked among the busiest ports in Nusantara (Najib et al., 2025).

Samalona Island and the VOC Military Strategy

After the Treaty of Bongaya in 1667, which marked Makassar's fall to the VOC, the Dutch consolidated maritime control by establishing surveillance posts along the coast and on nearby islands. Samalona emerged as a key point in this security system. Its position enabled the VOC to monitor and regulate ship traffic in and out of Makassar waters while anticipating resistance from remnants of local power, such as followers of Sultan Hasanuddin or Mandar and Bugis seafarers who continued to resist colonial rule (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

Although Samalona lacked a large permanent fort like the one on Kayangan Island, archival evidence shows that the Dutch stationed scouts and established temporary logistics posts on several small islands, including Samalona, as part of their maritime defense network (VOC Archives, 1683). These measures demonstrate that small islands were not passive backdrops but active elements in the colonial power structure. For Mandar and Bugis seafarers, the seas became a guerrilla and logistical battlefield, with fighters scattered across Nusantara during the Makassar

War. In response, the Dutch intensified surveillance by setting up lookout posts on surrounding islands, including Samalona (Rosalina et al., 2023).

A colonial military report from 1903 further notes that the islands near Makassar Harbor, including Samalona, served as testing grounds for short-range radio communications for military and maritime purposes. This evidence reinforces the view that Samalona played a role in Dutch East Indies military technology experiments leading into the 20th century (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

Samalona in World War I and Anticipation of Foreign Invasion

Although Nusantara did not become a direct battlefield during World War I, the Dutch East Indies government heightened military preparedness in key waters, including Makassar. A 1915 *Kolonial Verslag* report designated Samalona and nearby islands as *puncta de surveillance* (monitoring points) for foreign ships passing through the Makassar Strait. This measure remained in place into the 1930s, when geopolitical tensions in the Asia-Pacific intensified due to Japanese military expansion. The Dutch conducted additional surveys of maritime defense areas and identified strategic islands such as Samalona as critical elements in preliminary defense plans against potential naval attacks (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

Maritime and Ecological Exploitation

Beyond its strategic role, colonialism also reshaped how coastal communities engaged with small islands, including Samalona. The exploitation of marine resources by the VOC and other European traders transformed traditional maritime practices into a commercial system dominated by colonial power. Dutch sailors' and missionaries' journals reported large-scale fishing, sea cucumber harvesting, and coral extraction. Although Samalona was not explicitly mentioned, it formed part of the wider exploitation zone in Makassar's waters (Rosalina et al., 2023).

Colonialism functioned not only through military and commercial dominance but also by transforming the local worldview of the sea and small islands. Once regarded as social and spiritual spaces, these areas came to be treated primarily as economic assets and zones of control. Samalona Island was no exception to this shift.

The exploitation of maritime territories and small islands such as Samalona was not only part of the colonial military strategy but also an assertion of control over maritime natural resources. Samalona Island, located in the heart of the Makassar Strait (an area long recognized as a vital international trade route), experienced continuous exploitation from the colonial period into the modern era.

From the 17th century to the early 19th century, the VOC and European traders incorporated Samalona and its surrounding waters into the VOC's maritime exploitation zone. Dutch trade records compiled by Schrieke (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020) reveal that marine products such as dried fish, sea cucumbers, pearl oysters, and seaweed from Makassar's coastal areas and neighboring islands were exported to markets as far as South China and Europe.

Although VOC documents do not mention Samalona explicitly, its relatively small scale placed it firmly within the broader system of colonial marine resource extraction. Local fishermen, who had once harvested the sea primarily for community subsistence, were increasingly directed to satisfy the demands of the colonial market. This shift transformed the sea from a cultural and social space into a capitalist economic space (Arifin et al., 2024).

Coral and Limestone Extraction

Colonial records from the Dutch East Indies government in the early 20th century document the widespread extraction of coral and limestone from small islands around Makassar, including Samalona Island, for harbor construction, house foundations, and road building in Makassar (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020). The practice of crushing coral for construction material severely degraded coral reef ecosystems, which formed the biological foundation of these islands.

These activities continued into the early years of Indonesia's independence, worsened by the absence of effective oversight from local authorities. As a result, reef fish habitats, marine microbiota, and the natural coastal protection provided by coral reef systems suffered significant destruction.

Small Island as Extensions of Colonial Power

Within the framework of maritime colonialism, small islands like Samalona functioned as extensions of colonial power beyond the mainland. Vann Fraassen in Musyaqqat & Rahman (2020) emphasizes that control over small islands represented a classic imperial strategy to secure shipping lanes and consolidate political authority in archipelagic regions. This strategy is evident in the VOC's policy of creating a maritime control zone around Makassar, which positioned Samalona as a critical node within the Spermonde trade route system.

The evidence demonstrates that Samalona Island was not merely a passive geographic feature in the history of colonialism in South Sulawesi. Instead, it played an active role in the VOC's layered and continuous system of military, defense, and maritime control, stretching from the VOC era to the later colonial administration (Rinardi & Rochwulaningsih, 2020). This perspective enriches the historical narrative and deepens our understanding of the significance of small islands in shaping colonial power structures across the maritime landscape of Nusantara.

Japanese Occupation and the Military Role of Samalona (1942-1945)

During the Japanese occupation (1942–1945), the waters surrounding Makassar became a strategic zone for Japanese military operations in the eastern Nusantara. The Japanese took control of Dutch military facilities, including maritime observation posts and communication stations. Interviews with local community leaders, such as Daeng Tayang, (Limited Interview, July 16, 2025, Lae-Lae, Village, Distric Ujung Pandang), revealed that Samalona Island functioned as a small observation post used by Japanese occupation forces to monitor maritime traffic in the Makassar Strait and to detect potential Allied naval movements from the east (Department of Tourism of Makassar, 2015, Statistics Agency of Makassar City).

The arrival of Japanese troops in Nusantara in early 1942 reshaped the configuration of power and military strategy across coastal and island regions, including Samalona. With their military agenda and large-scale resource mobilization, the Japanese exploited strategic sites previously occupied by the Dutch, transforming small islands into lookout posts and naval defense points (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

Oral histories collected by the Government of Makassar City, along with testimonies from local elders, emphasize that Samalona Island played a dual role as a military observation site and a defense point. The Japanese constructed a lighthouse on the island to strengthen surveillance of maritime traffic in the Makassar Strait and to anticipate the possible entry of Allied forces from the eastern approaches to Makassar.

Mobilization of Labor and Marine Resources

The Japanese occupation reshaped not only the military landscape but also the socio-economic life of coastal communities. The Japanese mobilized local populations as forced laborers (*romusha*), often assigning them to military logistics related to the transport of goods and supplies by sea. Although no written documentation directly mentions Samalona, the forced labor system targeted coastal areas and strategic islands, where residents were compelled to support the logistics of the Japanese fleet.

Within this context, Samalona Island likely functioned as part of the distribution chain or as a transit point in the Japanese military logistics network in South Sulawesi. The Japanese military frequently used small islands as storage sites for weapons, fuel, or as observation posts during the Pacific War, a strategy also implemented on other islands in the eastern Nusantara, such as Morotai and Biak (Prakasa et al., 2023).

The Impact on the Community and Environment

The Japanese occupation affected Samalona Island beyond its military role, bringing significant changes to the use of space in coastal and surrounding marine areas. Military activities, including the construction of observation posts and the excavation of defensive trenches, left ecological imprints, albeit limited in scale due to the island's small size.

At the same time, local communities endured strict military surveillance, restrictions on fishing, and the obligation to supply seafood to meet Japanese logistical demands. These pressures generated social tension and forcibly altered the community's relationship with the sea. As Abdurrazak Daeng Patunru (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020; Rosalina et al., 2023), notes, the experiences of island communities under Japanese rule created a collective trauma that lingered long after independence.

The End of the Occupation and the Transition to Indonesia

After Japan's defeat in 1945, Samalona's role as a military stronghold quickly declined. The abandoned military posts became no-man's-land before being reoccupied by local groups or informally used by fishermen. This shift marked the beginning of Samalona's transformation

from a militarized zone to a space for civilian use, although for several years after Indonesia's independence, the area remained under heavy guard due to its strategic location.

Following the Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945, news of Indonesia's independence did not immediately reach island regions such as Samalona. Limited communication and the continued administrative control of the Japanese, who maintained authority until the arrival of Allied forces in October 1945, delayed the transition. Several sources indicate that coastal communities around Makassar, including Samalona's inhabitants, experienced a power vacuum, with no clear authority governing daily affairs (Reid, 2015).

During this uncertain period, the people of Samalona relied on informal social networks and customary structures to manage community life. Local leaders and traditional figures played a crucial role in maintaining social stability. The island also became a temporary refuge for coastal residents fleeing unrest on the mainland, including conflicts between disarmed Japanese soldiers and local fighters (Reid, 2015).

The arrival of Allied forces and the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) in Makassar in late 1945 brought Dutch troops seeking to reestablish colonial rule (Wellen, 2011). Their presence heightened political tensions that spread to coastal areas and small islands. On Samalona, Allied troops briefly used the island as an observation post in the Makassar Strait, exploiting its proximity to the main port (Reid, 2015).

The presence of foreign military personnel unsettled the residents of Samalona, many of whom began to express sympathy for the Indonesian government. Some young people from the island joined youth groups in Makassar to support the guerrilla struggle for independence, even though these activities were not officially recorded in military documents. Their involvement remained informal, rooted in strong local solidarity.

The integration of Samalona into Indonesia also produced conflict between the island's local elites and the new authorities. Tensions arose between leaders previously loyal to the Dutch or Japanese and younger generations who supported Indonesia's independence. The early revolutionary period in South Sulawesi was marked by intergenerational struggles and a clash between entrenched loyalties and the ideals of independence. Although Samalona was a small island and not a central stage of the revolution, these dynamics surfaced in family ties and clan-based coastal relations.

Several local figures who had served as logistical intermediaries for the Japanese sought to maintain their influence after independence, but they faced growing opposition from younger residents inspired by the ideals of Indonesian independence. This struggle produced minor social fragmentation that persisted until the early 1950s, when a functioning civil government consolidated control and the Indonesian state gained firmer authority in the coastal areas of Makassar.

The Integration into Indonesia and the Return of Civil Authority

By early 1947, after resistance against the NICA intensified and the Indonesian state began to gain broader international recognition, pro-independence local governments gradually assumed

control over coastal areas, including Samalona Island. Samalona was reintegrated into the administrative jurisdiction of Makassar City and functioned as a vital maritime logistics transit point. Authorities introduced normalization policies and population registration measures, although these efforts remained limited in scope.

For the people of Samalona, this transition marked a pivotal moment when national identity began to take tangible form. Residents openly raised the red-and-white flag, and independence celebrations were held on the island in simple yet solemn ceremonies. Although no major battles or direct resistance occurred on Samalona, the islanders' participation in supporting Indonesia's independence became part of a smaller but significant narrative within the broader history of local liberation.

Samalona's Sustainability Challenges and Prospects: Environmental Degradation and Ecological Threats

Samalona Island's transformation into a marine tourism destination over the past two decades has generated serious challenges for its ecological sustainability. Poorly managed tourism activities have damaged coral reefs, increased waste accumulation, and reduced seawater quality. A report by the World Wildlife Fund Indonesia noted that more than 50% of the coral reef cover around Samalona had experienced varying levels of damage, ranging from minor to severe, caused by snorkeling, waste disposal, and the use of motorized boats in fragile reef areas.

In addition, coastal abrasion and rising sea levels pose escalating threats. Research conducted by Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency in 2020 shows that small islands in the Makassar Strait are highly vulnerable to the impacts of global climate change. Without adequate mitigation measures, Samalona risks losing much of its landmass in the coming decades.

The Inequality of Access and Ownership of Space

Amid the rapid growth of tourism, issues of unequal access and spatial management have emerged on Samalona Island. Portions of the island have been commercialized for tourism, including accommodations and resorts that restrict public access, particularly for local fishermen and visitors from lower- and middle-income backgrounds (Nurdin, 2014). This reflects the broader trend of privatizing public space in modern tourism, which risks erasing historical traces and weakening the community's longstanding social relationship with the island (Nurdin, 2014).

Economic inequality further compounds the problem. Large investors and external capital owners reap most of the profits from the tourism industry, while local communities benefit only marginally, often limited to informal labor or small-scale economic activities. Without affirmative policies from local government, this tourism development model will deepen the marginalization of coastal communities (Casimiro et al., 2023).

Samalona Island, which covers less than two hectares, now serves as a concrete example of how maritime spaces undergo commodification and restricted access under the pressures of tourism capitalism. Historically inhabited by fishing communities and considered part of Makassar's coastal cultural heritage, Samalona has, over the past two decades, experienced a de

facto privatization process that has produced unequal access between local residents and capital owners (Casimiro et al., 2023). Research identifies four key factors driving this inequality.

The first is the privatization of the island and the commodification of the maritime landscape. Investors increasingly control land through the development of resorts, cottages, and exclusive diving sites, creating a latent phenomenon of spatial enclosure on Samalona. In practice, several stretches of beach and piers once open to the public are now managed exclusively for commercial purposes. The phenomenon is further reinforced by the absence of effective regulations safeguarding local communities' rights to maritime space (Rinardi & Rochwulaningsih, 2020).

The second is unequal access to resources and infrastructure. Inequality is evident in the distribution of clean water, energy, and public facilities on Samalona, where local communities frequently remain at a disadvantage compared to investors and tourism operators. Local residents still depend on water delivered from the mainland in Makassar City and on unstable diesel generators, while luxury resorts enjoy more reliable water and electricity supplies through privatization. This situation reflects the duality of space, as proposed by Lefebvre, in which space is not only physical but also socio-political, where power relations determine who gains access and control. Rinardi & Rochwulaningsih's (2020) research on small islands in Southeast Asia demonstrates that tourism often creates a new layer of segregation between upscale visitors and marginalized local residents, who coexist in the same area but remain divided by distinct socio-economic systems. In Samalona, this duality becomes clear: tourists enjoy exclusive facilities, while local children play among the ruins of the pier with no access to adequate public spaces.

The third lies in the absence of ownership schemes and the weakness of collective rights. The legal status of land on small islands such as Samalona often remains ambiguous. Many island residents lack official land titles even though their families have occupied the land for generations. Without legal documentation, they remain vulnerable to pressure from investors or developers who operate with the city government's approval. Coastal communities without formal land claims face significant risks of soft evictions, where displacement occurs not through violence but through economic pressure and restricted access. Moreover, Samalona lacks a community-based management mechanism that meaningfully involves residents in spatial planning. Instead, market logic and short-term profits drive development, sidelining social equity and ecological sustainability.

The fourth is unequal representation in island governance. Inequality extends beyond physical access to include the representation and voice of local residents in decision-making. Local governments often prioritize tourism actors with significant capital as strategic development partners, while islanders become mere recipients of symbolic training or corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Nevertheless, Matdoan et al. (2022) highlights the importance of a co-management model in which local residents actively participate in planning and overseeing small island governance. This approach not only secures equitable access and recognition of rights but also strengthens the socio-ecological sustainability of the region.

Samalona Island illustrates how small islands in Indonesia remain vulnerable to the dominance of tourism capitalism and weak systems of inclusive governance. Inequality in access and ownership of space affects not only residents' rights to housing and economic opportunities

but also the preservation of the island's historical and ecological values as part of its maritime heritage. To address these challenges, protective regulations, stronger communal rights, and the recognition of local history must form the foundation of a spatial justice strategy in coastal areas.

Marine Pollution and Poaching in the Modern Era

Since the 1980s, when Samalona Island emerged as a marine tourism destination, ecological pressures have intensified. Unsustainable tourism activities have accelerated marine environmental degradation. The most prominent forms of such exploitation observed locally include (1) blast fishing and cyanide fishing, which persisted among some fishermen in the 1990s and early 2000s despite being legally prohibited; (2) tourist boat traffic that damaged coral reefs through anchoring and fuel pollution; and (3) the disposal of domestic and plastic waste by visitors and tour operators, which polluted the coastal zone and contributed to declining seawater quality. Approximately 50% of the coral cover around Samalona Island has suffered bleaching or permanent death due to the combined pressures of tourism and rising sea temperatures.

Maritime exploitation also deepens disparities in access to ecological space between local communities and tourism businesses. Several parts of the island and its surrounding waters have been de facto privatized by resort developers and exclusive facilities. This restricts local fishermen from accessing fishing grounds that were once communal. Such dynamics reflect a form of environmental injustice, where traditional communities lose access to resources under the dominance of capitalist actors and weak local government oversight (Casimiro et al., 2023).

Thus, maritime and ecological exploitation on Samalona Island illustrates a complex historical trajectory. The pattern spans from the commercially oriented VOC colonial era, when the colonial government extracted natural resources, through the rise of tourism capitalism that continues to burden ecosystems and marginalize local communities. Without interventions grounded in ecological justice and historical preservation, Samalona Island risks becoming a tragic case of ecosystem collapse and the erosion of maritime cultural heritage.

Samalona Preservation and Repositioning Strategy as Maritime Heritage

To address challenges related to Samalona's condition, the island must be repositioned not only as a tourist attraction but also as an integral part of Makassar City's maritime heritage. With its layered history of colonialism, Japanese occupation, and post-independence transformation, Samalona deserves special attention in marine and coastal spatial management policies.

Several strategic steps can strengthen this effort: (1) implement ecological zoning that limits tourism activities in coral reef conservation areas; (2) involve local communities in tourism management through a community-based tourism (CBT) model; (3) digitize the island's history, for example, by developing a digital museum or installing historical narratives in public spaces; and (4) introduce ecological certification, such as sustainable tourism ecolabels, that provide incentives for businesses to protect the environment.

Indonesia's Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries has also promoted the establishment of community-based conservation areas in South Sulawesi's coastal regions, which could serve

as a model for Samalona. Collaboration among the government, academics, environmental NGOs, and fishing communities will be critical to the success of such programs.

Repositioning Samalona: From Tourist Attraction to Heritage Subject

Repositioning Samalona requires a paradigm shift, from an exploitative approach that treats the island as a consumer-driven tourism destination to a holistic approach that frames it as a cultural and ecological heritage subject. Within this framework, heritage should not be defined solely by the state or the market, but also through the active participation of local communities with deep historical and emotional ties to the space (Azzahra, 2025).

This repositioning acknowledges Samalona's historical significance within colonial and military networks, as well as its social role as a settlement and a livelihood space for service providers. The Government of Makassar City, in partnership with local communities, needs to establish a regulatory and educational framework that places Samalona on the national maritime heritage map alongside other historically significant islands such as Onrust and Banda Neira (Rinardi & Rochwulaningsih, 2020).

Maritime and Cultural Preservation Strategy

The preservation of Samalona Island requires a multi-level strategy that integrates ecological, historical, and social dimensions. These strategies include the following: The first is protecting the marine ecosystem and coral reefs. The reefs surrounding Samalona have declined due to uncontrolled tourism, the use of motorized boats, and destructive fishing practices. Effective conservation calls for the establishment of no-take zones and community-based coral restoration programs, similar to those successfully implemented in Wakatobi and Raja Ampat (Kustiwa & Mokodompit, 2025).

The second is documenting local maritime history. Preservation efforts must also capture the historical narratives of Samalona Island, including community accounts of the Japanese occupation, the legacy of the Dutch East Indies, and stories of traditional sailors and divers. These records can take the form of community archives or digital storytelling initiatives within culture-based ecotourism. The third is fostering maritime education for younger generations. Educational programs rooted in maritime heritage, whether integrated into local curricula or carried out through school field activities, can strengthen young people's awareness of Samalona's role within Makassar's maritime identity (Baso, 2024).

In addition, community-based ecotourism must be developed. Ecotourism on Samalona should align with principles of sustainability and emphasize local participation. Residents can serve as historical guides, manage eco-friendly homestays, or operate conservation-based marine tourism services. This model has improved community well-being while safeguarding ecosystems on many small islands across Indonesia (Prakasa et al., 2023).

Furthermore, maritime policy and urban spatial planning are essential. Repositioning Samalona as a maritime heritage site will not succeed without strong spatial planning support. The local government must designate Samalona as a legally protected maritime conservation zone, either through regional regulations or national schemes such as the marine protected area.

Achieving this goal also requires cross-sectoral integration among maritime, environmental, and cultural agencies (Asri et al., 2025).

Therefore, the strategy for preserving and repositioning Samalona Island must extend beyond physical and technical measures. It demands a comprehensive effort that integrates historical, cultural, and ecological aspects within a maritime heritage framework. Only through this approach can Samalona remain not only a visually striking landscape but also a historically meaningful and socio-ecologically sustainable living space.

Samalona as A Reflection of the Relationship Between Humans and the Sea

Samalona is more than a small island off the coast of Makassar. It embodies the long history of humankind's relationship with the sea, from a space marked by conflict and colonial domination to one shaped by contemporary economic and recreational activities. Samalona's shifting functions illustrate the evolving social, political, and cultural dynamics that continue to unfold within a fixed geographical setting.

As a symbolic space, Samalona offers valuable lessons in preserving history and ecology. The island serves as a tangible example of how historical narratives and sustainability approaches can coexist when managed in a participatory and equitable way.

Samalona is not merely a geographic point in the Spermonde Archipelago but also a socio-ecological arena that mirrors the relationship between humans and the sea across historical, cultural, and economic dimensions. As part of South Sulawesi's coastal island ecosystem, Samalona reflects the ongoing dynamic relationship between local communities and the maritime environment, which functions as a livelihood base and a spiritual space (Seniwati et al., 2025).

The Sea as A Living Space

For the coastal communities of Makassar and its surrounding areas, the sea has long functioned not only as an economic resource but also as a cultural and cosmological space. The Makassar and Bugis people, long recognized as skilled sailors, regard the sea as part of their collective identity. For them, the sea is not merely a resource; it is a second homeland, deeply embedded in daily life.

On Samalona Island, this human-sea relationship shapes the daily lives of its inhabitants, who have long depended on the sea for survival. Their livelihoods include traditional fishing practices that employ environmentally friendly techniques such as traps, drag nets, and hand lines. They also adapt to seasonal shifts (west and east winds) that determine fishing patterns, work systems, and forms of solidarity among fishermen. In addition, maritime rituals such as the *appalili* ceremony, a thanksgiving rite performed before the fishing season, continue to reflect the community's cultural connection to the sea.

This relationship is symbiotic, based on mutual exchange and mutual care, echoing the principles of deep ecology (Amalyah et al., 2016). Within traditional ecological systems, humans do not perceive themselves as superior to nature but as integral parts of a larger ecosystem. Naess emphasized the need to cultivate ecological awareness to strengthen human understanding of

their dependence on natural ecosystems. In this perspective, all living beings hold intrinsic value and possess the right to life, not only humans. By embracing simpler lifestyles and reducing consumption, humans can minimize their negative impact on the environment. Consequently, the framework of deep ecology provides a foundation for developing environmental policies that are effective and sustainable (Rusadi & Adni, 2025).

The Transition Toward Marine Tourism and Changing Relational Patterns



Figure 2. Samalona Island during the tourism boom near Makassar City (TRAC Astra, 2025).

Since the 1980s, Samalona Island has experienced significant changes in the function and perception of the sea. Once primarily a subsistence space, the sea has increasingly been regarded as a tourism commodity. This transformation has reshaped values and practices in the relationship between humans and the sea. Several factors define this shift: (1) the conversion of coastal spaces for the development of tourist resorts, piers, and other facilities; (2) spatial conflicts between local fishermen and tourism enterprises, as traditional fishing grounds shrink due to

tourist boat traffic; and (3) the commodification of the sea, in which beaches, coral reefs, and marine life are viewed as exotic objects for tourist consumption (Syamsuri et al., 2018).

The earlier symbiotic relationship has shifted into an exploitative one, where the sea is valued more for its economic potential than its spiritual or sustainable meaning. Yet, the local community of Samalona Island has not remained passive in the face of change. Many residents have developed social and economic adaptations by working as tour guides, operating small food stalls, or renting snorkeling equipment. However, these opportunities are not equally distributed, and inequality in access to tourism resources has emerged as a structural challenge.

The concept of social–ecological resilience (Aulia, 2025; Najib et al., 2025) helps explain how Samalona’s coastal communities navigate ecological and economic pressures. Their resilience depends on the capacity of local systems (traditional knowledge, solidarity, and cultural connections to the sea) to endure and innovate under global influences. To strengthen this resilience, the people of Samalona must manage natural resources sustainably, apply environmentally friendly practices, and minimize ecological damage. At the same time, diversifying their economy through tourism and fisheries can improve livelihoods. By combining local wisdom with sustainable management, Samalona’s people can enhance their ability to adapt and thrive amid ecological and economic transformations.

Samalona as A Microcosm of Indonesia’s Ocean

With all its complexity, Samalona Island represents a microcosm of Indonesia's human–sea relationship: from traditional maritime heritage and colonial exploitation to the capitalization of marine space and the unequal distribution of tourism benefits (Sharma, et. Al, 2024; Seniwati, et.al, 2024). As Nurdin (2014) argue, the relationship between humans and the sea in Indonesia is never neutral but instead shaped by negotiations of power, identity, and economics. This relationship must be understood holistically, not only as an ecological connection, but also as a political, economic, and cultural dynamic that evolves.

Samalona Island illustrates this dynamic interplay. It embodies the ecological harmony of traditional communities, the transformations brought about by commercialization, and the continuing efforts to adapt to and resist structural inequalities. In this sense, Samalona functions as a socio-ecological laboratory for understanding the trajectory of Indonesia’s marine development, especially in terms of sustainability, social justice, and the preservation of coastal cultural heritage.

The Transition to the Tourism Era

After Indonesian independence, the Indonesian Navy used Samalona Island as a military training ground. However, beginning in the 1980s, the Provincial Government of South Sulawesi initiated its development as a marine tourism destination (Arifin et al., 2024). Tourism infrastructure, including accommodations, piers, and snorkeling facilities, was constructed.

Interviews with residents reveal the scale of change that occurred following intensive tourism promotion in the 2000s. "*Samalona used to be quiet. Now, every weekend, people from Makassar and foreign tourists come here. In the past, we only saw a few fishing boats arrive on the island, but now*

we see many tourist boats coming every day. This has brought major changes to the island's economy, as many residents have opened businesses to serve visitors," explained Daeng Beta, a local community leader (Interview, June 17, 2024). While tourism has expanded economic opportunities, it has also introduced challenges, including land conflicts, coral reef degradation, and the marginalization of residents within the tourism economy (Arifin et al., 2024).

Identity and Narrative: From Military Post to Tourist Island

The evolving identity of Samalona Island illustrates how geographic space can be re-articulated and redefined over time. Once a militarized island, Samalona has now become a symbol of exoticism and recreation. This transformation aligns with Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, which argues that space is shaped by political-economic interests and dominant discourses. Tourism narratives often erase the island's colonial and militaristic past, replacing it with the imagery of a hidden paradise free from historical conflict. Yet, historical memory could serve as an integral component of history-based educational tourism (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

The shift in Samalona's identity, from a colonial military post and strategic point of maritime defense to a tourism destination, represents more than a functional change. It reflects a deeper process of how space is socially, economically, and culturally re-produced through time.

From Strategic Space to Consumer Space

During the colonial period, Samalona was integrated into a broader maritime surveillance network, first by local powers such as the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom and later by the Dutch East Indies government. Its identity was primarily militaristic: the small island functioned as a lookout post, a harbor protector, and a transit point for military logistics. During the Japanese occupation, Samalona also played a defensive role, serving briefly as a military base equipped with simple fortifications (Musyaqqat & Rahman, 2020).

From the New Order era to the present, however, Samalona has experienced a profound transformation in function and meaning. No longer defined as a strategic space, the island has been reimagined as a site of tourism and recreation. Since the 1990s, the Government of Makassar City has promoted Samalona as a paradise island known for its coral reefs and white sandy beaches, effectively erasing its historical identity as a militarized zone (Arifin et al., 2024).

Exoticism and the Commodification of Space

Samalona's transformation into a tourist attraction cannot be separated from the commodification of space, a process deeply embedded in the logic of tourism capitalism. Small islands like Samalona are reimagined as tropical playgrounds for local and international tourists, where notions of naturalness, remoteness, and marine virginity are packaged within an exotic narrative (Wijaya, 2020). This narrative often conceals the island's political history and past conflicts.

This process reflects Urry's (2016) concept of the tourist gaze, in which geographic space is shaped through a tourism lens that prioritizes visual pleasure, comfort, and escape from urban life. Within this framework, Samalona is no longer recognized as part of South Sulawesi's maritime geopolitical history, but rather rebranded as a weekend getaway destination, defined

and circulated through brochures, social media, and tourism branding strategies (Amalyah et al., 2016).

Demographic Changes and Residential Patterns

The transformation of Samalona's identity also emerges in its demographic and residential patterns. Once home to fishermen and maritime defense personnel, the island is now populated by small-scale tourism enterprises, including boat rentals, food stalls, and dive guides. Some of these ventures belong to migrants who moved to the island in search of economic opportunities in the tourism sector. Yet, behind the expanding tourism boom lies a complex social dynamic, marked by disputes over land access, water resources, and waste management. These tensions reveal the fragile balance between tourism-driven exploitation and ecological sustainability (Halim *et al.*, 2021).

Alongside demographic and residential shifts, a process that can be described as the decommodification of history has also unfolded. Ironically, Samalona Island's long-standing role in the maritime defense system of the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom, as well as during Dutch and Japanese colonial rule, remains largely absent from public awareness. Visitors encounter no historical markers, visual records, or educational narratives that acknowledge its past. This absence demonstrates how tourism spaces not only reshape physical geography but also selectively erase or reframe collective memory, sidelining histories that conflict with the commercial images they promote.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Samalona Island has undergone a significant transformation from the colonial period to the contemporary era. Initially functioning as part of the maritime network in the Makassar Strait, the island supported navigation, trade, and regional mobility. Over time, structural economic changes and development policies shifted its role from a strategic maritime space into a marine tourism destination. This transformation has reshaped not only the economic orientation of the island but also the socio-cultural dynamics of its local community.

Based on these findings, this study recommends the adoption of a historically informed and sustainable tourism development approach. Policymakers and stakeholders should integrate maritime historical narratives into tourism planning, for instance through educational and heritage-based tourism. Furthermore, preserving historical and cultural values is essential to ensure that tourism development contributes not only to economic growth but also to the protection of maritime heritage and local identity.

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