



Changes in the Architectural Function of the Bolon House of the Toba Batak Ethnic Group from Social Function to Tourism Object

Alpiani Lubis^{1*}, Immanuel Silaban², Eka Silviana Siregar³, Doan Yohannes Manullang⁴,
Anggun Yuni Sarah Saragih⁵

¹²³⁴⁵Prodi Sastra Batak, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

*E-mail: alpianilubis@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to uncover changes in the social function of the Bolon House, the factors causing the changes, and their impact on the meaning and cultural values of the Toba Batak people. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with document-based analysis (documentary research). This approach was chosen because the study focuses on literature reviews and secondary data relevant to the changes in the function of the Bolon House, without conducting direct observations in the field. Data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data, namely books, scientific articles, undergraduate theses, dissertations, and academic journals on Toba Batak architecture, as well as cultural tourism, as well as documentary data, namely digital archives, reports from local governments/tourism offices, and policy documents related to cultural preservation and tourism development. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction stages, sorting information from literature and documents relevant to the topic of changes in the function of the Bolon House. Categorization groups the data into themes: the traditional social function of the Bolon House, factors of change, implications for tourism, and cultural preservation. Although the change in function has the potential to reduce its sacred and social value, the existence of the Bolon House in the tourism sector also opens up opportunities for preservation, promotion of cultural identity, and empowerment of the local economy. Thus, this transformation needs to be managed wisely so that the Bolon House continues to function as a traditional architectural heritage that has sustainable social, cultural, and economic significance.

Keywords: architectural function, Bolon house, Toba Batak, social function, tourism object

Perubahan Fungsi Arsitektur Rumah Bolon etnik Batak Toba dari Fungsi Sosial ke Objek Pariwisata

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap perubahan fungsi sosial Rumah Bolon, faktor penyebab perubahan, serta dampaknya terhadap makna dan nilai budaya masyarakat Batak Toba. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan analisis berbasis dokumen (documentary research). Pendekatan ini dipilih karena penelitian berfokus pada kajian pustaka dan data sekunder yang relevan dengan perubahan fungsi Rumah Bolon, tanpa melakukan pengamatan langsung ke lapangan. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini terdiri atas data primer sekunder yakni buku, artikel ilmiah, skripsi, tesis, disertasi, dan jurnal akademik tentang arsitektur Batak Toba, serta pariwisata budaya serta data dokumentasi yakni arsip digital, laporan pemerintah daerah/dinas pariwisata, serta dokumen kebijakan terkait pelestarian budaya dan pengembangan pariwisata. Analisis data dilakukan dengan tahapan reduksi data memilah informasi dari literatur dan dokumen yang relevan dengan topik perubahan fungsi Rumah Bolon. Kategorisasi mengelompokkan data ke dalam tema yaitu fungsi sosial tradisional Rumah Bolon, faktor perubahan, implikasi bagi pariwisata dan pelestarian budaya. Meskipun alih fungsi berpotensi mengurangi nilai sakral dan sosialnya, keberadaan Rumah Bolon dalam sektor pariwisata juga membuka peluang pelestarian, promosi identitas budaya, dan pemberdayaan ekonomi lokal. Dengan demikian, transformasi ini perlu dikelola secara bijak agar Rumah Bolon tetap berfungsi sebagai warisan arsitektur tradisional yang memiliki makna sosial, budaya, dan ekonomi yang berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: fungsi arsitektur, rumah Bolon, Batak Toba, fungsi sosial, objek pariwisata

Submitted
11/11/2025

Accepted
24/11/2025

Published
28/11/2025

Citation	Lubis, A., Silaban, I., Siregar, E. S., Manullang, D. Y., & Saragih, A. Y. S. (2025). Changes in the Architectural Function of the Bolon House of the Toba Batak Ethnic Group from Social Function to Tourism Object. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra, Volume 4, Nomor 6, November 2025, 1761-1768</i> . DOI: https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v4i6.956
----------	--

Publisher
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Traditional architecture is a cultural heritage rich in meaning, values, and local wisdom, formed through a long process of human interaction with their environment (Arief Sumarto et al., 2024). Each traditional house serves not only as a residence but also as a representation of the community's belief system, social structure, and collective identity. One form of traditional architecture rich in symbolism is the Rumah Bolon, a traditional Toba Batak house found in North Sumatra. This house plays a crucial role not only as a residence but also as a center for social, cultural, and spiritual activities.

In Toba Batak society, the Rumah Bolon symbolizes the unity of the extended family living under one roof, reflecting the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy governing the kinship system. This house also serves as a place for deliberation, traditional ceremonies, and a forum for social interaction among community members. Architecturally, the Rumah Bolon is designed with a stage-like structure, a curved gable roof, and is decorated with gorga ornaments that hold philosophical and religious significance (Silaban & Sibarani, 2021). Thus, the Bolon House not only serves a practical function but also represents the cosmology and identity of the Toba Batak. However, with the flow of modernization, urbanization, and changes in lifestyle, the traditional function of the Bolon House has begun to shift (Andriansyah, 2024). Many Toba Batak people now prefer modern homes because they are considered more efficient, practical, and in line with the needs of the times. As a result, the Bolon House has lost its function as a primary residence. On the other hand, the existence of the Bolon House has found a new space in the context of cultural tourism. The Bolon House has been converted into a museum, a cultural performance center, and a tourist icon that attracts the attention of both domestic and international tourists. This change indicates a shift in function from traditional social functions to economic and tourism functions. This phenomenon is important to study because it carries complex implications. On

the one hand, the conversion of the Bolon House into a tourist attraction can support efforts to preserve traditional architecture, strengthen cultural identity, and provide economic benefits for the local community (Silaban et al., 2025; Simbolon, et al., 2025). However, on the other hand, this change also has the potential to diminish the sacred value and social meaning inherent in the Bolon House. This can lead to cultural commodification, where traditional houses are transformed into mere objects of entertainment without any substantive meaning. Studying the changing function of the Rumah Bolon is crucial for understanding how cultural heritage adapts to changing times. This research will analyze the changing function of the Rumah Bolon from a center of social life to a tourist attraction, the factors driving this change, and its implications for the preservation of Toba Batak culture (Silaban et al., 2019; Dafrina et al., 2022). Therefore, this research is expected to contribute to the discourse on the preservation of traditional architecture and the management of sustainable cultural tourism.

Based on the background and discussion results, the research questions are formulated as follows:

- 1) What is the traditional social function of the Rumah Bolon in the lives of the Toba Batak people?
- 2) What factors have led to the change in the function of the Rumah Bolon from a social residence to a tourist attraction?

First, to describe the traditional social function of the Rumah Bolon in the structure of life of the Toba Batak people. Second, to identify and analyze the factors that led to the change in the function of the Rumah Bolon from a social residence to a tourist attraction. These are the two research objectives in this article, which align with the research questions.

This research has many benefits. Theoretically, this research is useful. First, it adds to scientific studies on the transformation of traditional architecture from a social and cultural perspective. Second, it serves as an academic reference



regarding the changing function of traditional houses and the dynamics of cultural tourism in Indonesia. Third, it enriches the literature on the relationship between traditional architecture, social change, and cultural commodification. Practically, this research is also useful. First, it provides an overview for local governments and tourism offices in designing policies for preserving the Rumah Bolon. Second, it serves as a guideline for managers of cultural tourism objects in maintaining traditional values and avoiding excessive commodification. Third, to be a source of information for indigenous communities in understanding the importance of preserving the Bolon House as a cultural identity.

Several relevant articles can be found in various online journals. Perta, Nurafni, N., Laksono, A., Chairina, F., Sillahi, W., Tobing, Y. Z. B., Maryam, S. R., & Amri, I. (2024). The journal is entitled "Kelangsungan dan Perubahan Rumah Adat Batak Toba pada Masa Kini". This study aims to examine the continuity and changes that have occurred in Toba Batak traditional houses to date. The research method used is to dig up information from several previous studies as references. In addition, researchers also dig up information from books to obtain previously existing information. The results of the study show that although there are still some traditional houses that are maintained and preserved, most traditional houses have undergone significant changes. These significant changes include aspects of architecture, function, and building materials used. Factors such as modernization, economic needs, and external cultural influences also play a role in these changes. This study concludes that although Toba Batak traditional houses have undergone various changes, preservation efforts are still necessary to maintain their cultural values. Despite these changes, preservation efforts are still necessary to maintain the cultural and historical values contained within them.

Second, Dafrina, A., Fidyati, F., & Siska, D. (2022). Their journal, entitled "Perubahan Bentuk Dan Susunan Ruang Pada Arsitektur Tradisional

Suku Batak Toba Melalui Pendekatan Tipologi" (Studi Kasus: Desa Simanindo, Kabupaten Samosir, Sumatera Utara" (Case Study: Simanindo Village, Samosir Regency, North Sumatra), used a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. Data collection was conducted through interviews, documentation, and direct observation. Secondary data were obtained through reference books, journals, and articles related to the research. In accordance with the problems studied in several samples, the most common changes were subtractive transformation and additive transformation.

Third, Sinulingga, J., Putri Siallagan, I., Jenita, M. G., Sitorus, O. S., & Silaban, I. (2025). The title of the journal article is entitled "Rumah Bolon Batak Toba Sebagai Warisan Budaya dan Tantangan Pelestariannya di Era Modern". This article uses a descriptive qualitative research method with data analysis used is a literature survey derived from journal articles. The results of this study found that the cultural value of Rumah Bolon is divided into traditional architectural values, social and spiritual values, and philosophical values and the challenges of preservation in the modern era consist of modernization and lifestyle changes, urbanization and land conversion, high maintenance and restoration costs, globalization and external cultural influences, minimal support from the government and cultural institutions, lack of awareness and education, competition with modern tourism. From these challenges, strategies for preserving bolon houses emerged, such as strengthening cultural awareness and education, community-based economic approaches, digitalization and cultural documentation, policy and regulatory approaches, innovation in the design and function of bolon houses, and continuous research and development.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. Through this method, data on changes in the function of Bolon houses and the factors causing these changes are described qualitatively. Creswell (2014), Fraenkel et al. (2012), and Razak (2017) state that qualitative descriptive methods are often used by researchers in the social and cultural fields. This method was chosen because the research did not conduct field observations, but instead relied on various written sources and secondary data related to changes in the function of the Toba Batak ethnic Bolon House. This method allows researchers to explore in depth the changes in the architectural function of the Bolon House, the causal factors, and their implications through analysis of literature, archives, and official documents.

This research utilized secondary sources, including books, scientific journals, articles, research reports, and other academic sources discussing the Rumah Bolon, Toba Batak architecture, and the dynamics of cultural tourism. Data were collected using observation guidelines and source triangulation techniques. Afterward, the data were analyzed thematically.

RESULT

1. The Changing Function of the Rumah Bolon

Initially, the Bolon house served a social function. Through this function, the Bolon house served as: 1) the center of extended family life, inhabited by several generations under one roof; a place for deliberation, dispute resolution, and the conduct of various traditional ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals, and religious rituals.

The rumah Bolon reflects the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy that governs social relations among the Toba Batak people. The gorga ornaments on the Bolon house are not merely decoration, but symbols of protection, spirituality, and cultural identity.

However, over time, the Bolon house has fallen out of use as a primary residence, as people

prefer modern, practical homes that meet the needs of the nuclear family.

Many Bolon houses have been converted into museums, cultural galleries, and tourist attractions. The Bolon houses in Tomok (Samosir Island), Balige, and Huta Bolon Simanindo are concrete examples of this transformation, where traditional houses have become centers of cultural education and tourist destinations.

2. Factors Causing Transformation

Several factors causing changes in the function of the Bolon house are described below:

1. Modernization and urbanization: Changes in lifestyle make the Bolon house no longer suitable as a residence.
2. Changes in family structure: from extended families to nuclear families.
3. Government tourism policy: making the Bolon house a cultural icon of Lake Toba to support the tourism sector.
4. Cultural commodification: making the Bolon house an economic object and tourist attraction.

DISCUSSION

1. Traditional Social Function of the Rumah Bolon

In the Batak Toba community, the Bolon House is not simply a dwelling, but a symbol of social structure and cultural identity (Nurafni et al., 2024). This house is inhabited by an extended family spanning several generations. Collective life within it reflects the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy, which underlies the Toba Batak kinship system: hula-hula (the female giver), dongan tubu (the female recipient). Functionally, the Bolon House serves as a center for deliberation, a venue for traditional celebrations (weddings, funerals, and religious rituals), and a space for cultural education for the younger generation (Purba et al., 2024). Thus, the Bolon House's social function is closely linked to the preservation of norms, customs, and social solidarity. However, over time, this com-



munal living system has diminished. Many families choose to live in modern homes that are smaller, more practical, and more suited to the needs of the nuclear family. This marks the beginning of a shift in the Bolon House's function, from its dominant role as the center of daily life.

2. Factors Causing Changes in the Rumah Bolon

The change in the function of the Rumah Bolon into a tourist attraction did not occur suddenly, but was influenced by various factors:

Modernization and Urbanization: Changes in the lifestyle of the Toba Batak people, who tend to prefer modern houses, have caused the Rumah Bolon to lose its residential function. High mobility due to urbanization has also caused many Rumah Bolon to be abandoned or left to deteriorate.

Changes in Social Values: The life of the Toba Batak people is now more oriented towards the nuclear family, rather than the extended family. The role of customary deliberations has also been largely replaced by modern formal institutions.

Government Policy in Tourism Development: The North Sumatra government has made the Rumah Bolon a cultural icon to support the Lake Toba tourism sector. Rumah Bolon has been restored and turned into a museum, cultural performance center, and tourist destination.

Cultural Commodification: The influx of tourism has transformed the Rumah Bolon from a sacred space into an object of entertainment. Traditional ceremonies are often presented as performances for tourists, emphasizing aesthetic aspects over spiritual meaning.

3. Rumah Bolon as a Tourist Attraction

The transformation of the Rumah Bolon is evident in several Batak Toba tourist areas. For example, the Rumah Bolon in Tomok (Samosir Island) has been converted into a museum, displaying Batak Toba cultural artifacts, clan history, and Sigale-gale dance performances (Sitindjak, 2020). Similarly, at Huta Bolon Simanindo, the Rumah

Bolon serves as a cultural performance center for international tourists. In this context, the Rumah Bolon no longer serves as a residence, but rather as an educational medium, tourist attraction, and cultural preservation facility. Its existence strengthens the cultural identity of the Batak Toba while providing added economic value through the tourism sector.

4. Implications of the Change in Function of the Rumah Bolon

The change in function of the Rumah Bolon from a social function to a tourist attraction has dual implications, both positive and negative:

1) Positive Implications:

Cultural preservation: Although its social function is diminished, its conversion into a tourist attraction prevents the Rumah Bolon from disappearing. **Promotion of local identity:** The Rumah Bolon has become an icon that introduces the Batak Toba to domestic and international tourists.

Economic Empowerment:

Culture-based tourism activities provide employment opportunities and additional income for the surrounding community.

2) Negative Implications of Cultural Commodification:

The Bolon House risks being viewed merely as an aesthetic object devoid of philosophical and spiritual meaning.

Loss of Sacred Value: Traditional ceremonies performed for tourism often lose their original meaning.

Economic Dependence: A focus on tourism can make communities overly dependent on the fluctuating tourism sector.

To ensure that changes in the function of the Bolon House remain in line with cultural preservation, a sustainable management strategy is required, including: Revitalizing the Bolon House by involving indigenous communities as the primary managers; Developing a Bolon House-based

cultural education curriculum in schools around Lake Toba; Establishing regulations to ensure that cultural attractions maintain traditional values and meaning; and Encouraging synergy between the government, indigenous communities, and tourism operators to maintain a balance between cultural and economic functions.

CONCLUSION

The Bolon House, a traditional Toba Batak house, is a manifestation of traditional Indonesian architecture imbued with symbolic, religious, and social significance. In the past, the Bolon House served not only as a residence but also as a center for social and cultural activities for the Toba Batak people. It served as a place for extended families to live together under one roof, reflecting the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy, which emphasizes the balance between the hula-hula, dongan tubu, and boru. Furthermore, the Bolon House served as a forum for deliberation, a place for cultural education, and a venue for various traditional ceremonies. Therefore, it can be said that the Bolon House is the core of the Toba Batak community's social life. However, changing times have significantly impacted the continued function of the Bolon House. The tide of modernization, urbanization, and lifestyle changes have led people to prefer modern homes, which are considered more practical and suited to the needs of the nuclear family. As a result, the Bolon House's traditional function as a residence and center of social activities has diminished. This transformation is reinforced by government policies that have made the Bolon House a cultural icon in support of the development of Lake Toba tourism. Today, many Rumah Bolon are no longer inhabited, but have been converted into museums, cultural performance centers, and tourist attractions accessible to the wider public. This transformation presents two opposing sides. On the one hand, the change in the function of Rumah Bolon contributes positively to cultural preservation efforts, the promotion of Batak Toba identity, and the improvement of community wel-

fare through tourism. Rumah Bolon not only survives as a physical structure but also serves as an educational medium that introduces Batak Toba cultural values to the younger generation and international tourists. On the other hand, this transformation also carries the risk of cultural commodification, a reduction in sacred values, and a shift in the social meaning inherent in Rumah Bolon. Traditional rituals that were once full of meaning are now often performed as tourist attractions, emphasizing the aesthetic aspect rather than their philosophical value. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the transformation of Rumah Bolon from a social function to a tourism function is an inevitable process of cultural adaptation in the face of the dynamics of modernity. This process demonstrates that culture is not a static entity, but rather dynamic and always adapting to the needs of the times. The challenge facing the future is how to wisely manage this transformation so that the Bolon House remains sustainable as a traditional architectural heritage while maintaining its social, spiritual, and philosophical values. Thus, the Bolon House has a dual role in the contemporary context as a symbol of Toba Batak cultural identity, rich in social significance, and as a cultural tourism asset with economic value. To ensure both are in balance, integrated preservation efforts, sustainable tourism management, and the active involvement of indigenous communities in every process are required. Only in this way will the Bolon House survive not only as a tourist attraction, but also as a cultural heritage meaningful to the Toba Batak people and the Indonesian nation as a whole. tive clauses function as complements and clarifications. Analysis using the X-Bar theoretical framework shows that each nominal phrase is constructed through syntactic rules consistent with the principles of generative grammar, in which linguistic elements are str

The results also indicate that nominal phrases in Indonesian can fulfill various important syntactic functions, including as subjects, objects, com-



plements, and adverbs within sentence structures. The element distribution pattern found, with determiners tending to be in the initial position (pre-nominal) and adjectives, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses in the final position (post-nominal), reinforces the typological characteristics of Indonesian as a head-initial language.

Theoretically, these findings enrich the body of linguistic studies, particularly in the field of syntax, and provide empirical evidence that generative theory can be effectively applied to Indonesian. Practically, this research is useful in language and linguistics teaching and can serve as a basis for further research in applied linguistics, such as translation and natural language processing (NLP). Thus, this research not only strengthens the position of generative grammar in explaining the structure of nominal phrases in Indonesian but also contributes to the understanding of Universal Grammar, which reflects the general regularities of human language.

REFERENCES

- Andriansyah, D. M. (2024). Pengaruh Modernisasi pada Arsitektur Tradisional. *Jurnal Media Akademik*, 2(11), 1–20.
- Arif Sumarto, D., Zaini, A., Mildani, R., & Hardian, R. (2024). Reinterpretasi Arsitektur Tradisional dalam Desain Museum Budaya Lokal Aceh. Reinterpretation of Traditional Architecture In The Design of The Aceh Local Culture Museum 2024. *Journal of Informatics and Computer Science*, 10(2). <https://jurnal.uui.ac.id/index.php/jics/article/download/4924/2367>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan Mixed*. Penerjemah: Ahmad Fawaid. Editor: Saifudin Zuhri Qudsy. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Dafrina, A., Fidyati, F., & Siska, D. (2022). Perubahan Bentuk dan Susunan Ruang pada Arsitektur Tradisional Suku Batak Toba melalui Pendekatan Tipologi. *Arsitekno*, 9(2), September 2022, 60-69
- Fraenkel, J. R.; Wallen, N. E., Hyun, H. H. (2012). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education. Eighth Edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Nurafni, N., Laksono, A., Chairina, F., Sillahi, W., Br, Y. Z., Maryam, S. R., & Amri, I. (2024). Kelangsungan dan Perubahan Rumah Adat Batak Toba pada Masa Kini. *Journal of Creative Student Research (JCSR)*, 2(3), 157–165.
- Purba, D. G., Tan, T. I., Saragih, Y. I. W., Manik, J. K., Elisyah, A. N., & M, H. S. (2024). Mengenal Rumah Bolon Purba “Jejak Tradisi dan Budaya Batak Simalungun.” *INNOVATIVE: Journal of Social Science Research*, 4, 9012–9020.
- Razak, A. (2017). *Menggapai Mixed Methods Bidang Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia*. Pekanbaru: Ababil Press.
- Samosir, A. (2013). Transformasi Arsitektur Tradisional Rumah Adat Batak Toba di Toba Samosir,” *Gener. Kampus*, vol. 6, no. 2, 144–162.
- Saputra, A., Syaputra, H., Syahid, A. G. A., Ulhaq, M. R., Dafrina, A., & Novianti, Y. (2025). Representasi Arsitektur Tradisional Aceh pada Gedung Lama DPRK Aceh Utara. *Jurnal Ilmiah Teknik Unida*, 6(1), 88–94. <https://doi.org/10.55616/jitu.v6i1.1044>
- Silaban, I., & Sibarani, R. (2021). The Tradition of Mambosuri Toba Batak Traditional Ceremony for a Pregnant Woman with Seven Months Gestational Age for Women’s Physical and Mental Health. *Gaceta Sanitaria*, 35, S558–S560. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gaceta.2021.07.033>
- Silaban, I., Sibarani, R., Situmorang, H., & Widayati, D. (2019). Performance of Marhata Unjuk in Batak Toba Wedding. *KnE Social Sciences*, 2019, 970–979. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i19.4921>

- Simbolon, A. B., Sembiring, F. G., Silalahi, E. K., & Chairunnisa, H. (2025). Peran dan Dinamika Marga dalam Masyarakat Batak: Antara Tradisi dan Modernitas. *Jurnal Lingkar Pembelajaran Inovatif*, 6(3), 25–37.
- Sinulingga, J., Siallagan, I. P., Grace, M., Saragi, J., & Sera, O. (2025). Ruma Bolon Batak Toba sebagai Warisan Budaya dan Tantangan Pelestariannya di Era Modern. *Parataksis: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia*.
- Sitindjak, R. H. I. (2020). Apropriasi Rumah Tradisional Batak Toba pada Arsitektur Gereja Katolik Pangururan di Samosir. *Appropriation of Batak-Toba Traditional Houses in the Architecture of the Pangururan Catholic Church in Samosir*. *Jurnal BioKultur*, 9(2), 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.20473/bk.v9i2.23118>
- Suryaningsih, R. Mumu, R., & Purwanto, A. (2022). Integrasi Sosial Mahasiswa Suku Batak di Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Politik Universitas Sam Ratulangi Manado Sulawesi Utara. *Jurnal Ilmiah Society*, 2(1), 1–10.