



Local Wisdom as a Sustainable Strategy for Public Space Management in Makassar

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Abstract: *This study aims to explore how the local wisdom of the Bugis-Makassar community can be integrated into sustainable public space management in Makassar. Using Lefebvre's theory of the Production of Space, Harvey's Right to the City, and the concept of cultural sustainability, the research positions public space as a social and political construct shaped by power relations and cultural meaning. The study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach, with data collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation in key public spaces including Losari Beach, Karebosi Field, and community-driven alleyways (Lorong Wisata). Findings reveal that urban modernization tends to marginalize local wisdom, exacerbating inequality and undermining social cohesion. However, grassroots initiatives rooted in cultural values such as siri' na pacce and gotong royong show strong potential for inclusive and participatory revitalization. These findings contribute to spatial theory by integrating cultural dimensions into the concept of spatial production and offer practical strategies for equitable and culturally grounded urban planning.*

Keywords: *public space, local wisdom, production of space, community participation, Makassar*

Introduction

Main Problem and Its Significance

Over the past decade, major cities in Indonesia, including Makassar, have experienced rapid spatial transformations driven by urbanization, modernization, and economic expansion (Pratomo et al., 2023). While these developments have introduced improvements in infrastructure, economy, and technology, they have also threatened the sustainability of public spaces that traditionally function as arenas of social, cultural, and ecological interaction (Prakash et al., 2023; Ziemelniece & Locmele, 2022). Formerly vibrant communal hubs and cultural landmarks have increasingly been replaced by commercialized and exclusive urban landscapes, disconnected from their cultural roots (Ding et al., 2021; García Espinosa & Hernández Estrada, 2025).

This issue becomes even more critical when the management of public spaces disregards local wisdom, leading not only to the erosion of communal spaces but also to social fragmentation, a decline in residents' quality of life, and escalating conflicts of interest among stakeholders (Kim et al., 2021; Spaces et al., n.d.). Rather than fostering inclusivity, public spaces are beginning to stratify urban residents by class and economic access (Ergun & Kulkul, 2019; İnce Güney & Balikesir University, n.d.). Hence, the central question of this

study is not simply how public spaces are managed, but how local cultural values such as *siri' na pacce*, *sipakatau*, and *gotong royong* can be revitalized as guiding principles in the inclusive and sustainable management of public spaces (Ekawati et al., 2022; Ismail & Ismail, n.d.).

Spatial and Social Context

Makassar, as a strategic coastal city in Eastern Indonesia, serves not only as an economic and service hub but also as a city with a deep-rooted cultural heritage (Nagel, 2018). Rooted in Bugis-Makassar values, its people maintain a strong social connection to traditional public spaces such as *baruga* (communal halls), mosque courtyards, village alleyways, and coastal areas like Losari Beach (Faisal & Hasyim, 2022). These spaces are not empty urban voids but serve as social arenas where cultural celebration, community interaction, and even local economic systems take place (İnce Güney, n.d.).

Over the past two decades, however, Makassar has undergone rapid urbanization. Infrastructure projects, commercial developments, and coastal reclamation initiatives have dramatically altered the city's physical and social landscape (Hakim et al., 2019). Traditional public spaces have been displaced by modernization projects that prioritize economic value over social function (Chan, 2020; Hakim et al., 2019). This shift has transformed public spaces from inclusive commons into selective and exclusive environments, thereby reshaping patterns of community interaction and weakening collective urban identity (Carmona & Wunderlich, 2013).

State of the Art (Previous Literature)

Existing literature on public spaces in urban Indonesia has highlighted the loss of social functions and the homogenization of urban culture (Wilfritz et al., n.d.). Gehl (2011) underscores the need for urban design that encourages social interaction, while Lefebvre (1991), through his concept of the production of space, argues that space is inherently social and political, rather than merely physical (Lahode et al., 2020). In the Indonesian context, studies by Setiawan et al. (2020) and Prasetyo et al. (2023) indicate that the decline of green and social spaces in urban centers is linked to declining quality of life and widening social inequality (Espinosa Hernández, 2020; Pierce & Martin, 2015).

Specifically in Makassar, Rahman et al. (2021) observe that public space modernization projects, such as the revitalization of Losari Beach and Karebosi Field, have improved aesthetics and economic functionality but often overlook local socio-cultural dimensions (Ekawati et al., 2020; Rohadi et al., 2024). Yulianti et al. (2021) also note that urban planning reforms have diminished traditional, community-based spaces and accelerated the erosion of cultural values. Several scholars have criticized top-down development models for marginalizing local communities, who are in fact the key actors in sustaining public spaces (Guo et al., 2022).

Research Gap

Despite considerable attention to the transformation of public spaces and urban challenges in Makassar, little research has examined how deeply rooted local wisdom can be concretely integrated into contemporary public space management (- et al., 2020). Many

studies tend to focus on the physical or ecological aspects of public space, often overlooking the essential role of socio-cultural values as integral components of sustainable urban planning (Tang & Mukhamedjanov, 2024).

Another overlooked aspect is the role of power relations in the production of public space—specifically, who benefits, who is excluded, and how cultural resistance manifests in the face of spatial commodification. This study aims to address these gaps by offering an approach that conceptualizes public space not merely as an economic or physical product, but as a dynamic site of social, political, and cultural negotiation (Barbosa & Pereira, 2018).

Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to explore and analyze how the local wisdom of Makassar's communities can be meaningfully integrated into the management of public spaces, ensuring they continue to function as inclusive, sustainable, and culturally embedded spaces amid the forces of modernization and urbanization.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- a. How have the socio-spatial transformations of public spaces in Makassar unfolded over the past two decades?
- b. What forms of local wisdom can serve as the foundation for sustainable public space management?
- c. How do power relations and community resistance emerge in the production and use of public space?
- d. What models of public space management can harmonize ecological, social, and cultural sustainability in Makassar?

Theoretical Framework

To build a comprehensive analytical framework, the study draws upon several key theories. First, Henri Lefebvre's production of space serves as the foundation for understanding public space as a socially and politically constructed arena, rather than a neutral or purely physical entity. This theory allows for the interpretation of space as both a product of power and a site of social resistance.

Second, Robert Putnam's theory of social capital (2000) is employed to explain how social networks, norms, and trust function as resources that support community collaboration and resilience in public space management.

Third, the concept of cultural sustainability is used to frame local values such as *siri' na pacce*, *sipakainge*, and *gotong royong* not merely as traditions, but as adaptive strategies for maintaining shared urban spaces. This framework emphasizes the need for urban development that acknowledges social and cultural dimensions, in addition to ecological and economic factors.

Lastly, David Harvey's (2008) theory of the right to the city provides a normative lens through which to examine how urban dwellers assert their right to equitable, inclusive, and culturally resonant spaces, and how public spaces can become arenas of resistance to exclusion and commodification (Harvey, 2020).

Methodology

Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on urban ethnography, allowing the researcher to immerse in the everyday lives of urban communities and explore the meanings embedded in social interactions within public spaces. This approach is chosen because public space is not merely a measurable physical entity but a socially constructed arena rich with symbols, identities, and power relations.

Urban ethnography in this context focuses not only on observing the behavior of space users but also on uncovering the narratives that shape and surround these spaces—how residents assign meaning to them, how local wisdom influences their social practices, and how these spaces are maintained or transformed amid rapid urbanization. Consequently, the study centers the experiences and perspectives of the community, treating them as subjects of knowledge rather than passive objects of observation.

Research Strategy and Design

The research employs an intrinsic case study strategy, with Makassar as the sole focus. This strategy is selected due to the unique contextual nature of the problem, which is inseparable from the city's social, cultural, and ecological characteristics. Makassar is not merely a physical space but a site where multiple narratives intersect—between modernization and local wisdom, between economic growth and social preservation.

The research design is flexible and iterative, allowing for adjustments as data collection unfolds in the field. The researcher acts not only as a passive observer but engages actively with communities to build trust and gain deeper insights. Data collection methods are applied simultaneously and complement one another, with a strong emphasis on participant experiences and the socio-spatial dynamics of public space.

Research Sites and Participants

The study is conducted in several strategic public spaces in Makassar that reflect the dynamics of spatial transformation within the local context. These include Losari Beach, Karebosi Field, and various Lorong Wisata (alleyway tourism spots) that serve as examples of community-based public space development.

The research sites are selected purposively to represent diverse social, economic, and cultural functions. Losari Beach, for instance, symbolizes the transformation of coastal public space towards tourism and economic development. Karebosi Field and Lorong Wisata are chosen as examples of spaces that have undergone revitalization through different approaches—one via large-scale urban projects, the other through grassroots community participation (Devienne & Price, 2024).

Research participants include a wide range of actors directly involved with the selected public spaces: local residents who use the spaces daily, informal economic actors such as street vendors, cultural and artistic communities, as well as city officials and urban planners (Piyapong et al., 2019). Efforts are made to ensure diversity of perspectives so that the data collected reflects the complex social landscape of the city.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection utilizes multiple complementary techniques to capture the diversity of meanings and practices within public space. The primary method is participant observation, where the researcher not only observes behavior and activities but also engages in community events to gain deeper insight into social interactions (Hibbert & A., n.d.). Observations include spatial usage patterns, daily activity rhythms, and community responses to spatial changes.

In-depth interviews are conducted with key informants, including community leaders, small business operators, space users, and government representatives. These semi-structured interviews are designed to remain open to unexpected narratives (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). The interviews focus on participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and critical reflections on public space transformation and the role of cultural values.

The third technique is documentation, which involves collecting secondary data such as archives, photographs, maps, and urban planning documents (Ptichnikova, 2018). These materials provide contextual depth and serve as a reference for validating insights gained from observation and interviews.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed thematically to identify patterns of meaning, symbols, and power relations found in participants' narratives and field observations (Sandhiya & Bhuvaneswari, 2024). An inductive process is used, where key themes emerge through continuous engagement with the data rather than being predefined.

Prominent themes identified include public space transformation, spatial commodification, community resistance, and local wisdom-based revitalization. Basic spatial analysis is also conducted to visually map changes in space usage over time, highlighting functional shifts in key locations (Haupt et al., 2025).

Additionally, narrative analysis is employed to understand how residents articulate their relationship with public spaces—how memories, identities, and emotional attachments shape their interpretation of space (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). This approach integrates both physical observations and the lived, collective memory of the community.

Research Ethics and Data Validity

This study places high importance on research ethics, especially given the direct involvement of local communities. All participants are engaged with full transparency and informed consent, both verbal and written, in accordance with ethical research standards (O'Sullivan et al., 2020). Participant identities are kept confidential unless explicit consent for disclosure is given.

To ensure data validity, several strategies are applied: triangulation of methods (observation, interviews, documentation), triangulation of sources (diverse informants and locations), and triangulation of time (data collected over an extended period to capture evolving dynamics) (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024). A member-checking process is also conducted by discussing preliminary findings with participants to confirm that the researcher's interpretations align with their lived realities.

Furthermore, the researcher maintains reflexivity by consistently recording field notes that document emotional responses, personal assumptions, and potential biases throughout

the research process. This reflective practice ensures that the analysis remains grounded in the data and respects the plurality of perspectives encountered in the field (Joy et al., 2024).

Result and Discussion

Public Space Transformation: From Social Arenas to Spatial Commodification

The transformation of public spaces in Makassar encompasses not only physical changes but also social and cultural dimensions that shape the meanings of these spaces in everyday life. Areas such as Losari Beach and Karebosi Field, once communal gathering places, have shifted toward spaces oriented around economic commodities and tourism. A long-time vendor at Karebosi reflected bitterly on the changes, recalling a time when the area was filled with relaxed social activities—sitting, chatting, and community interaction—before it was converted into a fast-paced fitness zone with little meaningful engagement.

These findings affirm Lefebvre's Production of Space theory (1991), which posits that space is never neutral but is always produced through socio-economic and political relations (Schmid, 2022a). In the case of Makassar, public space has shifted from a social arena to a site of capital accumulation, where economic value dominates both the design and function of urban space.

Value Shifts and the Erosion of Local Wisdom

This transformation has also affected the social values that traditionally underpinned the Bugis-Makassar community. Values such as *siri' na pacce*, *sipakatau*, and *gotong royong*, once deeply embedded in the use of public space, are gradually being eroded by the rise of individualistic and consumerist lifestyles.

A local cultural leader noted the decline in community norms, lamenting how once-prevalent practices of mutual correction in maintaining shared spaces have been replaced by indifference. This indicates a reduction in social capital, defined by Putnam (2000) as the web of trust and norms that binds communities together (Christoforou, 2011a). This erosion is consistent with findings by Rahman et al. (2021), who highlight how rapid urbanization weakens physical space-based interactions and undermines collective awareness of shared space stewardship.

Socio-Spatial Tensions and Community Resistance

The modernization of public space in Makassar has generated socio-spatial tensions between economic interests and the socio-cultural needs of local communities. Reclamation projects such as the Center Point of Indonesia (CPI) have triggered resistance from coastal residents who have lost access to vital living and livelihood spaces. A fisherman interviewed expressed his frustration over restricted beach access due to commercialization-driven development.

Community resistance is also evident in grassroots movements such as Makassar Berkebun (Makassar Gardening), which seeks to reclaim green spaces for social and environmental use. This form of resistance can be understood through David Harvey's Right to the City (2008), which emphasizes citizens' rights to inclusive, just, and culturally resonant urban spaces (Harvey, 2020).

Comparison with Other Studies: National and Global Contexts

Similar patterns of transformation are occurring in other major Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Denpasar, where public spaces have increasingly lost their social

functions under the pressure of urban capitalism. Setiawan et al. (2020), in a study on Surabaya, found that commercialization-based revitalization often results in sanitized, exclusionary spaces that are unwelcoming to the urban poor.

Globally, these trends echo what Mitchell (2003) identified in *The Right to the City*: urban spaces that were once egalitarian are now becoming exclusive domains governed by economic interests (Zalloom, 2018). However, Makassar's strong cultural roots offer a distinct contrast. The persistence of values like *siri' na pacce* serves as an anchor of social resistance and cohesion, distinguishing Makassar from other cities experiencing homogenizing global influences.

Theoretical Synthesis and Field Data: Bridging Modernization and Local Wisdom

Field data reveals that the core challenge of public space governance in Makassar lies in the imbalance between modernization pressures and the need to preserve local culture. The theory of Cultural Sustainability (Soini & Dessein, 2016) is particularly useful in interpreting this dynamic: sustainability encompasses not only ecological but also cultural identity and social well-being (Christoforou, 2011b, 2011a).

One example is the Lorong Wisata revitalization program, which transformed narrow alleyways into creative, culturally grounded spaces. A local resident praised the program for restoring inclusive social spaces that facilitate collective activity and interaction. These initiatives underscore that urban modernization does not need to erase local values; instead, it can strengthen them when guided by participatory and sustainable principles (Rodrigues et al., 2025).

Socio-Spatial Consequences: Inequality and the Erosion of Social Cohesion

The transformation of public spaces has contributed to increasing spatial inequality. Exclusive, commercialized zones such as CPI and elite areas along Losari Beach have produced spatial segregation that exacerbates class-based disparities. Prasetyo et al. (2022) noted that low-income communities are being increasingly excluded from once-inclusive public spaces (Haupt et al., 2025).

This shift has also eroded social cohesion previously built through shared, face-to-face interactions. The migration toward privatized and digital spaces has accelerated processes of social individualization. This aligns with Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, which argues that changes in spatial structures influence patterns of social interaction (Haupt et al., 2025; Werlen, 2009).

Strategic Directions: Participatory Revitalization and Inclusive Policy

Based on field findings and theoretical reflection, achieving culturally grounded public space sustainability in Makassar requires three key strategies:

Participatory Revitalization: Every public space development initiative must actively involve residents from the planning stage. As one community leader emphasized, involving citizens in public space governance fosters a sense of ownership and collective responsibility (Cummins, 2017).

Inclusive Cultural Policy: Urban spatial policies must include protections for cultural values and equitable spatial rights. Integrating culturally inspired architectural design into new public spaces should be strengthened, as demonstrated in projects like Taman Pakui Sayang (Almahmood et al., 2022).

Strengthening Social Capital and Cultural Education: Public education campaigns on the importance of public space and local wisdom should be expanded into schools and community institutions to ensure that younger generations remain connected to their cultural roots (Patterson, n.d.).

Conclusion of the Discussion: Public Space as a Mirror of Identity and Power Relations

This discussion illustrates that public spaces in Makassar are not merely physical containers but mirrors of identity, power relations, and socio-economic dynamics. The ongoing transformation presents both opportunities and threats: opportunities to build more modern and livable urban spaces, but also threats to cultural continuity and social solidarity.

In Lefebvre's terms, space is a product of social production and must be constantly defended as a site of inclusion, justice, and cultural identity. Urbanization is inevitable, but the future of Makassar's public spaces depends on the extent to which local values are integrated as the foundation for shared spatial governance.

Conclusion and Contribution

The transformation of public space in Makassar, as examined in this study, demonstrates that space is far from a neutral physical entity. Rather, it is a contested field where identity, power, and social relations are negotiated and struggled over. The modernization of the past two decades has profoundly altered communal spaces that once served as centers for social interaction and representations of local cultural wisdom. Public spaces in Makassar—such as Losari Beach, Karebosi Field, and the city's alleyways—have undergone significant shifts: from spaces of social interaction to sites of consumption, from open commons to increasingly restricted and exclusive environments.

Conceptually, the findings of this study reinforce Lefebvre's notion of space as a socially produced construct embedded in power relations (Pierce & Martin, 2015). In the context of Makassar, space is shaped not only by economic forces and policy directives but also by cultural resistance and the collective memory of local communities. These spaces reflect how both individual and collective identities are inscribed into the urban landscape, and how changes in space actively reshape social structures and dynamics (Rodrigues et al., 2025). Moreover, they illustrate how space becomes a site through which people enact their right to the city—even amid conditions of inequality and marginalization.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in expanding the Production of Space framework by incorporating local wisdom as a central element in the production and reproduction of space (Yan, 2022). While Lefebvre's theory has primarily been applied in Euro-American contexts, this study extends its relevance to urban Indonesian societies with deep-rooted and distinctive cultural traditions. It reveals that in cities like Makassar, the production of space cannot be separated from values such as *siri' na pacce* and *gotong royong*, which persist in collective memory and social practices (Schmid, 2022b). The concept of cultural sustainability is further elaborated here by reading space as a relational product of modernity and tradition.

Beyond theoretical enrichment, this study offers practical contributions to the fields of Urban and Regional Planning as well as urban policy development. It underscores that the

success of public space management cannot be measured solely by economic or aesthetic indicators, but must also account for socio-cultural dimensions (Mahmoud, 2022). Urban planners and policymakers are called to move beyond top-down development models toward participatory planning frameworks that recognize and respect the voices of local communities. In the case of Makassar, community involvement in space planning and management—as exemplified by the Lorong Wisata initiative—demonstrates how locally grounded and participatory approaches can produce more just, inclusive, and sustainable urban spaces.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the fields of urban anthropology and mobility studies, particularly in examining how urban communities in Indonesia interact, adapt, and maintain their identities amid rapid spatial transformations (Turner et al., 2025). By centering local experiences, the study highlights that public spaces are not only physical environments but also emotional and cultural spaces imbued with meaning. The various forms of mobility—social, economic, and physical—within these spaces generate complex, and at times contradictory, layers of significance (Mehta, 2024).

This study also deepens our understanding of how resistance to spatial change can manifest in non-confrontational forms. Everyday practices such as gathering at food stalls, using alleyways as communal spaces, or holding small cultural events in open areas serve as subtle yet meaningful acts of cultural resistance. James Scott's concept of *infrapolitics* is particularly relevant here, showing how resistance often operates beneath the surface while playing a vital role in preserving collective identity.

Like many qualitative inquiries, this study has its limitations. The primary constraint lies in its scope and representativeness. The focused examination of specific sites in Makassar provides rich insights but may not fully capture the broader complexity of spatial transformation across other Indonesian cities (Zahle, 2024). Moreover, the study has concentrated on physical spaces and has yet to explore the growing interplay between digital and social spaces in contemporary urban life. Future research should consider how the digitalization of space—through social media, ride-hailing platforms, or virtual environments—influences how public space is understood, accessed, and produced.

Additionally, this study has not comprehensively examined gendered and generational experiences in public space use. Questions remain about how women, children, and people with disabilities navigate and experience public spaces in Makassar. Future research could also take a longitudinal approach to monitor how public space dynamics evolve over time, shedding light on whether observed changes are temporary or long-term.

Conflict Of Interest

The author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest, whether financial or non-financial, that could have influenced the conduct of this research, data analysis, interpretation of results, or the preparation of this article. The entire research and writing process was carried out independently and was free from any external interference that might compromise scientific objectivity.

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