

# Street Anthropology: A Study Of Social And Cultural Barriers To The Effectiveness Of Land Transportation In Makassar

Djufri<sup>1</sup>, Ansar Arifin<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Basir<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Berau, : [djufri@umberau.ac.id](mailto:djufri@umberau.ac.id)

<sup>2,3</sup> Hasanuddin University

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## **Abstract**

*This study explores street spaces in Makassar as social arenas that serve as channels for vehicle mobility and as living spaces that accommodate social interactions, informal economic activities, and cultural expressions. Employing a qualitative approach with critical ethnography, the research is grounded in theoretical perspectives from Henri Lefebvre's production of space, Pierre Bourdieu's habitus, Anthony Giddens' structuration, and James C. Scott's concept of infrapolitics. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations at 45 street locations, and analysis of local policy documents. The research sites include high-activity areas such as Pasar Butung, Tamalanrea, and Panampu. Everyday practices such as sidewalk vending, informal parking, and the use of streets for religious events reveal subtle forms of resistance to formal spatial planning, which tends to be exclusive. The findings indicate that Makassar residents have developed alternative systems of spatial management that are not legally recognised but are socially legitimised. Most of the 62 informants interviewed emphasised that the street plays a vital role in their livelihood and identity. These findings underscore the importance of understanding streets as socially produced spaces shaped through everyday practices. The study concludes that effective urban street planning must recognise and integrate the socio-cultural dimensions of urban life. This research contributes to reframing urban planning approaches toward more inclusive, equitable, and context-sensitive frameworks.*

**Keywords:** *street space, citizen resistance, urban anthropology, production of space*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In many developing cities, street space is often understood merely as a functional corridor that connects one point to another. However, in Makassar, streets serve not only as transportation infrastructure but also as vibrant social arenas where daily interactions, informal economic activities, and cultural expressions occur. In densely populated and informal urban areas, streets often become extensions of the home, workplace, food stalls, and even places of worship (Sheikh-Mohammad-Zadeh et al., 2022). This dual function creates a complex dynamic between formal urban planning and the spontaneous practices of local communities.

Problems arise when urban policy narrows streets as traffic channels to regulate, order, and optimise for vehicle flow. Such approaches frequently lead to conflict between the state and its citizens (Biber-Freudenberger et al., 2025). Street spaces used for vending, informal parking, or community gatherings are often deemed disruptive and subject to clearance operations. These efforts eliminate crucial social and economic activities and disrupt the livelihoods of those who have long depended on these spaces (De Villiers et al., 2022; Tanny & Sutanudjaja, 2023).

This phenomenon is observable in Makassar, especially in areas such as Pasar Butung, Panampu, and narrow kampung alleys bustling with daily activity. Streets become sites of negotiation between social classes, a space for children to play, pedicab drivers to work, and motorbike communities to gather (Akil et al., 2023). Infrastructure projects such as road widening, sidewalk revitalisation, or flyover construction often transform these social functions drastically (Adugbila et al., 2023; Kahangirwe & Vanclay, 2024). Rather than enhancing access and comfort, such changes often sever residents from spaces they once inhabited.

Interestingly, citizens do not remain passive in the face of these changes. They respond with adaptive and creative strategies. Vendors relocate just a few meters away when roads are closed for construction. When parking on the roadside is banned, residents create flexible informal parking systems. Some even use

plastic bottles or bricks to self-regulate vehicle flows in narrow lanes. These are local solutions from real-life experiences and needs (Clelland, 2021; Tan, 2018).

This study draws on Henri Lefebvre's production of space, which sees space not merely as a physical entity but as the result of complex social processes (Rutanen, 2017; Schmid, 2022). This perspective helps reveal how various actors produce, use, and interpret streets differently. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus adds that seemingly deviant practices such as informal parking or sidewalk vending are not merely violations but relatively socially structured behaviours (Cockerham & Hinote, n.d.; Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration furthers this by showing how society shapes and is shaped by everyday actions (Chatterjee et al., 2019; Hardcastle et al., 2005). James C. Scott's infrapolitics enriches this analysis by highlighting how citizens engage in subtle, often invisible forms of resistance to formal authority (Dohnal, 2021; Seidman, 2012).

The study adopts a critical ethnographic approach, observing citizens' practices directly and interpreting them through social theory. Ethnography enables an in-depth understanding of the logic behind how people use street space, while critical theory exposes the power relations between the state, citizens, and urban space (Ballesteros & Lemus, 2023; Mahmood, 2024; Soukup et al., 2017). This combination reveals the street as a site of symbolic and practical struggle imbued with meaning.

This study offers four key contributions. First, it presents a new perspective of streets as living spaces, not merely traffic channels—a perspective that challenges dominant technocratic approaches to transport planning (Beukes et al., 2011). Second, it uncovers how citizens' resistance is not always expressed through protest or confrontation, but through creative and sustained everyday adaptations (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022; Singh, 2017). Third, it emphasises the importance of incorporating citizens' social logic into transportation and spatial policies (Sanchez et al., 2004, 2018). Fourth, it situates Makassar as a rich social laboratory, contributing to urban studies from the Global South (Nagel, 2018; Pratomo et al., 2023).

This research aims to understand how street spaces in Makassar are socially produced and interpreted by residents, and how these practices interact with, challenge, and negotiate with state-led policies (Akil et al., 2023). This study argues that transport effectiveness should not be measured solely by vehicle speed or road width but by how well the system accommodates the long-standing social life embedded within street spaces (Azin et al., 2025; de la Torre et al., 2021). In doing so, the study provides not only an anthropological analysis of urban streets but also proposes a planning approach that is more inclusive, empathetic, and grounded in the social realities of urban communities. The central question addressed is: how do Makassar residents construct and reproduce the meanings of street space, and how do their practices negotiate with a technocratic policy framework? (Ahmadin & Misbawati, 2024; Akil et al., 2023).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative design with an urban ethnographic approach, aiming to understand how the people of Makassar produce, utilise, and interpret street spaces in their everyday lives. Ethnography was chosen for its ability to deeply explore social practices, especially those often excluded from formal systems. Through this approach, the researcher gains direct access to social realities and observes how the meanings of space are shaped and negotiated from within.

The research was conducted in several strategic areas across Makassar that represent diverse uses of street space. Locations such as Pasar Butung, Jalan Veteran, Panampu, Jalan Somba Opu, Tamalanrea, and various roads near campuses and the city centre were selected as primary observation sites. These areas showcase dynamic street life, including informal economic interactions, resistance to regulations, organically grown social spaces, and tensions between formal planning and local practices.

The core focus of this study is on street-use practices by residents, not the street as a physical object, but as a social space constantly redefined through human activity. Emphasis is placed on how residents interpret, manage, and respond to changes in street space influenced by government policy, modernisation pressures, and daily survival needs. Particular attention is given to informal practices such as sidewalk vending, illegal parking, community gatherings, and the use of streets for religious rituals, all of which shape the city from the ground up.

The study is grounded epistemologically in a critical-interpretive paradigm. The researcher seeks to understand how people construct meaning around street space and aims to uncover the power relations embedded within it (Ryan, 2018; Williamson, 2018). Knowledge is a social construct formed through lived experience, narrative, and daily practice.

Data were collected using three primary methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse informants, including street vendors, motorcycle taxi drivers, informal parking attendants, community leaders, and everyday street users. Second, participatory and repeated field observations were carried out during busy mornings, leisurely afternoons, and when youth and motorbike communities gathered. Third, a document analysis was conducted on local government regulations, traffic laws, urban planning reports, and media archives concerning spatial conflict and development projects.

The collected data were analysed thematically using interpretive strategies and theoretical framing. The analysis involved repeated readings of field data to identify patterns, meanings, and underlying relationships. Themes such as social space production, micro-resistance, spatial conflict, and symbolic street use were identified, clustered, and interpreted within the theoretical framework. The analysis followed an iterative process, evolving alongside the researcher's deepening understanding of the field. Visual tools such as alley sketches, study area maps, and field photographs were also used to reinforce the narrative.

Several key theoretical frameworks support the study. Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space provides the foundation for understanding streets as socially produced spaces through everyday practices (Rutanen, 2017). Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic capital help explain how acts such as informal parking or sidewalk vending are socially embedded dispositions shaped by collective experience (Cockerham & Hinote, n.d.). Anthony Giddens' structuration theory assists in understanding how individuals are not only shaped by formal structures but also actively reproduce them through daily actions (Hardcastle et al., 2005). James C. Scott's notion of *infrapolitics* offers insight into the subtle forms of resistance enacted by citizens against perceived injustices in the system (Roca Martínez, 2017). Methodologically, the study aims to generate a contextual and critical understanding of the sociocultural role of street spaces in urban life. It does not merely document practices but seeks to interpret meaning, expose underlying social structures, and illustrate how the city is organised from the bottom up. Through this approach, the research offers theoretical and practical contributions to urban studies by framing the street as a space for negotiation between state logics and everyday citizen practices and proposing new directions for more participatory, socially grounded urban planning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research finds that street spaces in Makassar are not merely physical infrastructure for vehicular movement, but rather socially meaningful arenas. Streets are used, negotiated, and constantly reproduced by citizens through everyday social, economic, and symbolic practices. Similar studies in Manila (Fernandez et al., 2018) and Nairobi (Kariuki & Magez, 2021) have shown that streets often serve as symbolic negotiation spaces, not merely transportation corridors. By applying Henri Lefebvre's production of space, Pierre Bourdieu's habitus, Anthony Giddens' structuration, and James C. Scott's *infrapolitics*, fieldwork demonstrates how residents actively produce meanings around streets and challenge formal urban planning logic. For example, the synthesis of Lefebvre and Scott illustrates how space is simultaneously produced through structural forces and micro-level resistance embedded in daily practices.

### 1. Streets as Living Social Spaces

In areas such as Pasar Butung, Tamalanrea, and Panampu, streets function as mobility corridors and living environments. Researchers observed residents sitting along sidewalks to socialise, children playing ball in alleyways, and street vendors setting up daily stalls on pavements. These activities occurred without formal instructions or permits, yet unfolded regularly and with internal order. In this context, the street operates less as a technical entity and more as a communal necessity.

This reinforces Lefebvre's argument that urban space is always socially produced. Residents use streets not according to technocratic designs, but in response to collective needs and lived experience. The street

becomes a social arena, facilitating cross-class interaction, neighbourhood familiarity, and a staging ground for cultural rituals.

## **2. Behavioural Habitus and Local Driving Logic**

Findings also reveal that local norms shape residents' driving behaviours more than formal traffic regulations. Standard practices include parking haphazardly, driving against traffic, or running red lights at night. As one online motorcycle taxi driver said, "If we do not, we lose money. You have to find your way here."

From a legal standpoint, such acts are violations. However, through Bourdieu's habitus, these behaviours can be interpreted as the result of deeply embedded social structures (Cockerham & Hinote, n.d.). When the city fails to provide adequate space for citizens' needs, people develop adaptive practices legitimised by social consensus. In this light, rule-breaking often emerges not from disobedience but from navigating a system that fails to reflect lived realities.

## **3. Street Space as Informal Economic Base**

Field observations show that street spaces in many areas serve as essential platforms for the informal economy. Street vendors, tire repairers, buskers, and food sellers use sidewalks and roadsides as their primary workspace. To reach more customers, vendors deliberately target high-traffic areas, such as Jalan Veteran and traditional market zones.

This illustrates how streets are produced by the state and citizens who fill functional voids in the city. Lefebvre argues that space is never neutral (Batuman, 2019). Streets function as spaces of social and economic production guided by residents' daily needs. However, in formal policy, such presence is often framed as disruptive, ignoring their vital role in the city's dynamism.

## **4. Conflicts Between Formal and Social Functions**

Spatial conflict emerged as a key theme. In many areas, road widening or sidewalk revitalisation projects led to the eviction of vendors without sufficient alternatives. One vendor on Jalan Cendrawasih noted, "We were told to move, but not given another place. This is where we make our living."

Authorities' enforcement often clashes with residents' everyday practices. In Makassar's 2021–2026 Regional Development Plan (RPJMD), street space is framed primarily as a logistics corridor, neglecting its social dimensions, creating interpretive tensions.

Giddens' structuration theory explains this conflict as a mismatch between formal structures and the agency of everyday actors (Workman, 2010). When the state sees streets solely for vehicles, all non-vehicular uses are deemed deviant. However, for residents, these spaces are sources of livelihood. The conflict is not merely physical, but symbolic, where the state imposes one meaning of space while erasing deeply rooted local meanings.

## **5. Micro-Resistance and Adaptive Strategies**

Despite increasing pressure from state policies, residents do not passively comply. They develop forms of micro-resistance that are subtle yet effective. For instance, vendors return to sell after the authorities leave. Residents create systems such as informal parking zones, handmade traffic markers, or agreed-upon schedules for large vehicle access.

Scott describes this as *infra politics*, everyday resistance that is non-confrontational but strategic. These actions arise because government policies offer little room for meaningful participation. In turn, residents self-organise and construct the city through their logic. These are not mere violations but expressions of citizen agency in the face of spatial inequality.

## **6. Streets as Symbols of Identity and Cultural Representation**

Researchers also found that certain streets in Makassar serve as symbolic markers of community identity. Jalan Somba Opu, for example, is known for souvenir shops; Jalan Riburane for tailors and artisans; and Jalan Sultan Alauddin as a rally point for student protests. Neighbourhood streets are also used for cultural events like Maulid processions, Ramadan parades, and communal celebrations.

In these contexts, streets function as stages of representation. Residents interpret them as integral to their social world, sites of memory, heritage, and shared identity. As Lefebvre emphasised, space is not merely formed by architecture, but also by the cultural meanings inscribed through practice (Memela et al., 2025). Erasing the social function of streets equates to erasing the collective identity embedded within them.

### 7. Role of Non-State Actors in Street Production

Beyond the state and ordinary residents, non-state actors such as motorcycle communities, youth groups, and informal associations also play important roles in organising street space. In markets and busy intersections, these groups often manage parking, ensure safety, and coordinate traffic, despite lacking formal authority; they are socially recognised.

Sometimes, these actors serve as intermediaries between residents and officials, creating effective though unofficial systems. This reveals that urban space production is inherently collaborative, though rife with negotiation. Local actors fill the void with their systems and logic when the state fails to act inclusively and dialogically.

### CONCLUSION

This study examines street space in Makassar, not merely as transportation infrastructure, but as a socially meaningful arena. Grounded in Henri Lefebvre's production of space, Pierre Bourdieu's habitus, Anthony Giddens' structuration, and James C. Scott's infrapolitics, this research reveals that streets are never just conduits for moving from one point to another (Meerzon, 2024). Streets are part of urban life, where people work, gather, celebrate culture, and resist exclusionary spatial planning. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations across various street locations, and analysis of local planning regulations.

One of the key findings is that Makassar's residents produce street space through spontaneous yet organised daily practices. From sidewalk vending and flexible parking to using streets for religious events, residents construct and transform space according to real-life needs. These practices demonstrate that streets are not static or one-dimensional spaces but dynamic and contested arenas shaped through ongoing interaction between citizens, the state, and informal actors.

These findings reinforce Lefebvre's view that space is always a product of social processes. Streets are shaped not only by state-led policies and infrastructure development but also by the meaningful ways residents use them (Yamamoto, 2018). In Makassar, street space becomes a zone where multiple economic, social, ritual, and symbolic functions intersect. A technocratic understanding of streets as traffic corridors is thus inadequate without recognising their embedded social roles.

A second major finding points to the emergence of micro-resistances by residents in response to top-down policies that fail to accommodate local practices. Street vendors returning after eviction, residents managing informal parking zones, or communities continuing to use streets as gathering places all represent forms of citizen agency. Through the lens of infrapolitics, these actions are not simply rule violations but expressions of the right to urban space (Hou & Knierbein, 2017; Mittelman †, 2004). Such resistance shows that citizens are not passive subjects of policy but active agents renegotiating their everyday environments. However, informal uses like unregulated parking or pop-up stalls often lead to traffic congestion and social tensions, especially during peak hours.

Third, the study highlights spatial inequality in the production of urban space. State actors and urban planners often impose spatial forms and functions based on order, efficiency, and aesthetic ideals. In practice, however, urban space is never neutral. Tensions arise between formal state-defined functions and the social functions enacted by residents. When state projects erase the social use of space for infrastructure, what is lost is not merely physical access but also the informal economies, social networks, and community identities embedded in those spaces.

In this context, habitus is key to understanding why citizens' behaviours do not immediately change even when infrastructure is upgraded. Acts such as parking along roadsides or vending on sidewalks are not due to ignorance of regulations, but rather the result of long-standing social conditioning.

Meanwhile, structuration theory explains how citizens are not only shaped by structures but also actively shape and reproduce them through their actions. Informal practices around street use in Makassar demonstrate how residents develop alternative systems that sometimes clash with, but at other times complement, formal planning systems.

This study concludes that street space is a complex and dynamic social arena, not merely a technical zone. Residents' interpretations of the street go far beyond transport utility, touching upon identity, livelihood,

solidarity, and resistance issues. Therefore, any intervention or policy targeting street spaces must consider the deeply embedded social realities.

This research offers an alternative approach to urban planning, which too often overlooks the social logic of urban residents. The study is academically relevant by introducing an urban anthropological perspective and offers valuable insights for policymakers and urban planners seeking more inclusive and dialogic planning approaches. Its primary contribution lies in framing street space as a site of meaning production, not merely a technical object. Referencing Lefebvre and Scott, the study emphasises that space is produced through symbolic interaction between state power and citizen agency, an interaction continually negotiated through everyday practice (Zieleniec, 2018).

Looking forward, this study opens opportunities for further exploration of how other urban spaces, such as markets, sidewalks, parks, and alleyways, are also socially produced and constitute equally important sites of negotiation.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that no conflicts of interest could have influenced this article's outcomes, interpretations, or preparation. The entire research and writing process was conducted independently, without pressure or influence from parties with direct or indirect interests in the article's content.

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