

# Moving Public Space: The Teman Bus Program And Cultural Negotiation In Urban Mobility

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## ABSTRACT

*This article looks at how the "Teman Bus" urban transport program in the Mamminasata metropolitan area of Indonesia has affected culture and society. This study looks at how public buses change into moving social spaces that change how people act and how they move around through the lens of policy anthropology as a cultural agent. Some users of this study value efficiency, order, and modernity, and they feel like they are part of modern society. Others, on the other hand, refuse or adapt in creative ways because deeply rooted informal mobility practices have been disrupted. The rise of new social norms on buses and hybrid mobility strategies show how modernity and tradition are always in conflict in city life. This study says that seeing transport policy as a cultural intervention is important for making urban mobility systems that are more open to everyone and last longer.*

**Keywords:** *Urban Mobility, Public Space, Cultural Change, Teman Bus, Informal Transportation, Social Negotiation, Anthropology of Policy*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, as in many other developing countries, urban transport reform often focusses on technical solutions, like buying new fleets and using cutting-edge technology. These interventions are very important, but they often ignore the cultural practices that are deeply ingrained in how people move around every day. Transportation is more than just getting people from one place to another; it is a strong cultural force that changes habits, values, and the way people interact with each other. Policies about transport, whether they mean to or not, try to create a new culture of mobility in society. This often leads to unexpected tensions and changes.

The "Teman Bus" program in the Mamminasata metropolitan area (Makassar, Maros, Sungguminasa, and Takalar) is a great example of how this works. The Indonesian Ministry of Transportation started the program in 2020. It is a big change in how public transportation is run. The Buy The Service (BTS) scheme focusses on Operational Expenditure (OPEX) instead of Capital Expenditure (CAPEX), which has not worked well in the past. In the past, the central government would give buses to local governments, which often had trouble paying for them. In this model, the government "buys" services from private companies and makes sure they follow strict Minimum Service Standards (SPM) and are reliable.

This technocratic solution to pollution and traffic jams included a fleet of modern, air-conditioned buses, a set schedule, and payments that had to be made without cash. But this intervention didn't happen in a vacuum. It was built on top of a complicated and strong city landscape that had been ruled by the informal transportation culture of *pete-pete* for a long time. For decades, these small, privately-owned minibuses have run on a system of flexibility, quick response, and cash-based, personal interaction. They can stop anywhere, change routes, and are the main part of a social and economic system for thousands of drivers and their families. So, the arrival of Teman Bus wasn't just the start of a new service; it was also a direct threat to a way of life that had been around for a long time and a deeply ingrained culture of mobility.

This article looks at the implementation of Teman Bus not just as a simple infrastructure project, but as a rich and complex cultural event. We look at how the public bus changes into what could be called a "moving public space." This is a temporary place where new social norms are created, new identities are formed, and the formal, rule-based values of a formal system clash and negotiate with the fluid, informal logic of the street. The main question this study is trying to answer is: How does the Teman Bus policy change social practices as a cultural change agent, and how do urban communities deal with, adapt to, and negotiate the presence of this new mobility culture in their daily lives? We want to learn about the complex processes of cultural adaptation, resistance, and social re-formation that happen when people use, drive, and other people are involved in top-down modernisation efforts.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Policy Anthropology is the framework for this study. It looks at policy not as a neutral, technical tool, but as a cultural and political artefact. We use the idea of policy as a cultural agent, as described by Shore and Wright (1997). From this point of view, policy is seen as a "cultural project" that purposefully and actively spreads certain values, norms, and practices throughout society in order to change behaviour and identity. The Teman Bus policy is a great example of this kind of project because it clearly stresses being on time, clean, organised, and good at using technology. It comes with a set of "modern" values that city residents are expected to adopt, which will make them more disciplined and able to use technology when they travel.

This framework lets us look at the policy's more obvious, technocratic goals (like lowering traffic) and also at its less obvious and often unintended effects on social structures and cultural life. We look at how this policy works as a cultural agent in three different ways.

- Creates new social spaces: The policy literally makes new spaces, like the insides of buses, where strangers can test, challenge, and form new ways of interacting.
- Cultural Clashes: When a formal, rule-based system is put in place, it will inevitably clash with cultural practices that are already in place, like the flexible and informal culture of the *pete-pete*. This conflict is not only about money; it is also about culture, with different ways of thinking about time, space, and social interaction.
- Encouraging Negotiation and Adaptation: People and groups don't just accept policy; they take part in it. They actively negotiate, fight against, and adapt to these changes. This framework focusses on human agency by showing how people in a community reinterpret and use top-down orders to meet their own needs and situations.

So, the success of a policy like Teman Bus isn't just based on technical things like how many people ride it. It's also based on how well it can connect with and become a part of the local culture. This method helps us understand better why policies that are technically sound can run into big problems when they are put into action.

## 3. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method to get the rich experiences and subjective meanings of the people involved in the Teman Bus program. The design is a qualitative case study, which is the best way to look at a modern phenomenon in its real-life context in a deep and complete way.

The main ways we collected data were through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. These methods helped us get a deep and multi-faceted understanding of the cultural dynamics at play:

- Participatory Observation: The researcher closely watched people inside Teman Bus vehicles on different routes and at different times of day, as well as at important bus stops and terminals. The main things I looked at were how people interacted with each other on the bus, how they interacted with the bus driver (*pramudi*), how social norms (like giving up seats) came about and were enforced, how hard it was for people to use the bus (especially when it came time to pay), and how different the bus's current state was from the often-neglected infrastructure that supports it.
- Semi-structured Interviews: We did in-depth interviews with 17 informants who were chosen because they had different views on the program:
  - Regular Users: To learn about the benefits, problems, and daily life of using the service.
  - Users from Vulnerable Groups: Specifically, people with physical disabilities, to look into issues of accessibility and digital exclusion.
  - Teman Bus Drivers (*Pramudi*): To learn more about the stresses of running a bus, enforcing rules, and how passengers act.
  - *Pete-pete* Drivers and Organda Representatives: To get the point of view of the informal sector, including their worries about money and their cultural resistance.
  - Government Officials and Program Management: To learn about the policy's goals, how it works, and the problems with managing it.

The goal of these interviews was to get a deeper understanding of how people feel about comfort, safety, changes in behaviour, and the complicated ways they adapt to their daily mobility.

- Thematic Analysis: After gathering data from interview transcripts and extensive field notes, we used Braun & Clarke's (2021) six-phase guide to systematically analyse the data. This was a repeated process of

getting to know the data, coding it for the first time, finding themes, reviewing them, and defining them. The main goal of the analysis was to find patterns and themes that kept coming up in relation to cultural change, the creation of public spaces, value conflicts, and adaptation strategies. This was done to build a clear and data-rich story about the socio-cultural effects of the Teman Bus policy.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The use of Teman Bus in Mamminasata has turned into a complicated cultural drama, showing how deeply rooted the conflicts are between top-down modernisation and bottom-up social realities. The results are grouped into three main themes: the bus as a new social space, the clash and negotiation of different mobility cultures, and the strange role of technology as both a tool for progress and a way to keep people out.

##### 4.1. The Bus as a New Social Space: The Rise of Manners and Togetherness

The Teman Bus is more than just a way to get around; it has become an important new public space in Makassar. gentle, regulated, and shared environment has turned into a moving social space, where people from different backgrounds meet, talk, and subtly negotiate the processing of coexistence. In this small area, new social norms and ways of interacting have developed that are very different from those of other types of transportation.

Many users reported that a common theme was the rise of selfless behaviour and a sense of community. This often showed up in small but important acts of kindness. MA, a regular user, told a story that shows how people can feel responsible for each other in a shared space: "I once saw a passenger who was having trouble paying with their QRIS. I helped them scan it with my phone. When they tried to give me the money, I told them there was no need. I said, 'Kindness must keep rotating. So next time you see someone who needs help, you help them too'. This story shows that passengers can feel responsible for each other in a shared space.

The spontaneous adoption of politeness norms made this sense of community even stronger. People started to expect and see people give up their seats for those who needed them more, like the elderly, pregnant women, or women with children. A Teman Bus driver, NI, made the difference very clear: "It's very different [from informal transport]... if there are pregnant women, the elderly, or women, someone will definitely give up their seat. It's already a habit." This was echoed by users like MA, who said, "I've seen it myself. If an elderly woman gets on, someone will immediately stand up and offer their seat. That's really good to see."

But this same public space also became a place where social norms and tensions were negotiated. The fact that strangers were so close to each other brought out hidden social rules. The same user, MA, noticed how gender dynamics worked: "I've also noticed that if a woman sits next to a man she doesn't know, she'll instinctively create a bit of distance, become more self-protective. Maybe it's because of past experiences or something, but there's a kind of generalised distrust."

At other times, rules had to be actively enforced. MA told a story about how angry he was with college students who pretended to be asleep so they wouldn't have to give up their seats. He said that he used his position as a lecturer to step in: "There were these male students pretending to be asleep and not wanting to give their seat to a mother. It was clear that she needed it more. Since I'm a lecturer, I directly told them, 'Hey, that's a mother, let her sit.' They immediately got up and gave her the seat. So sometimes you have to use a bit of a power relation too." These experiences show that the bus is not a passive space but an active stage where social hierarchies, gender norms, and civic etiquette are constantly tested, debated, and enforced by the passengers themselves. A new shared understanding of how to act in public space is slowly being formed through these daily interactions.

##### 4.2. Different ways of getting around and hybrid ways of adapting

The start of Teman Bus caused a classic fight between two very different ways of getting around. On the one hand, Teman Bus brought in a formal-structured culture with rules, schedules, and things that were easy to predict. Users of this culture must follow a new set of rules: they must wait at certain stops, pay with a certain method that doesn't involve cash, follow a set route, and stick to a schedule. NI, a driver, said that the pressure to only stop at designated haltes is a big operational problem: "The rule about only stopping at the halte, if we don't follow it, we get sanctioned. But we want to follow it, yet we face obstacles on the road, like traffic jams that mess up the schedule."

On the other hand, this modern culture directly confronted the existing informal-flexible culture of the *pete-pete*, which has long been the lifeblood of Makassar's mobility. The *pete-pete* culture is based on

being flexible and responsive. A driver said, "With us, we can stop anywhere. We can even go into the alleys if a passenger asks. And the payment is cash, we get the money right away." This system puts convenience and flexibility ahead of comfort and punctuality, even if it means sacrificing comfort and punctuality. The head of the local transport group, Organda, talked about another part of this culture: "Pete-pete are small, so they can go anywhere. They're faster at picking up passengers. A bus is big, so it's hard for it to get into the narrow streets."

Users didn't just switch from the old system to the new one; they kept using both. Instead, they came up with and made hybrid mobility strategies normal, showing that they were very good at getting around the city's transport system. Many people, especially those who live far from a fixed bus stop, regularly use an online motorbike taxi (ojek), get a ride from a family member or even take a pete-pete first to get to a Teman Bus stop. User AN said, "The distance from my house to the bus stop is quite far, so I usually take an online ojek first. Or sometimes my husband drops me off. Or sometimes I even take a pete-pete first and get off near the stop." Another user, MA, said something similar: "The distance from my house to the Teman Bus stop is quite far, I have to take an online transport like Grab or Gojek, but I prefer that over driving my own vehicle."

This is not a temporary phase of transition but a stable and rational form of integration. Users are combining the informal mode's point-to-point accessibility and flexibility with the formal mode's comfort, safety, and low cost. This shows that the community is not just a passive recipient of policy; they are an active agent who puts together different mobility options to find the best solution for their needs and situations. This is a clear example of cultural negotiation, not cultural replacement. Also, the fact that pete-pete drivers don't want to become official "feeders" shows how different their cultures are. They turned down the idea not only because it would hurt their bottom line, but also because it would take away the freedom and independence that makes their work culture unique. One driver said plainly, "If pete-pete become feeders, all the drivers will gather in one place and fight over passengers. There will be fights. It's not practical."

#### **4.3. Technology, Exclusion, and Conflicting Facts**

The technology behind the Teman Bus program, from its payment systems to its operational monitoring, has been a double-edged sword. On one hand, it has made things more efficient and disciplined. On the other hand, it has created new forms of exclusion and shown clear material contradictions.

One of the main promises of the program was that it would be modern, but this was often only true of the vehicle itself. The high-tech, clean, and air-conditioned buses are in stark contrast to the rundown state of the infrastructure that supports them. Management proudly talked about their strict maintenance checks: "We check the ramp every day... If there's even a small scratch, the bus doesn't run or it's replaced." However, this level of care did not extend to the passenger experience outside the bus. People who used the bus stops (halte) and even government officials always said bad things about them. An official from the Makassar City Transportation Agency said, "Those bus stops, many of them are full of holes, unfit for use. Sometimes it's just a signpost."

This contradiction directly undermined the program's story of comfort and convenience for users. One person said, "It's really hot when you wait for the bus at the stop. If it rains, you get soaked. It's so different from inside the bus, which is cool." For people with disabilities, this lack of infrastructure was more than just annoying; it made it hard for them to get on the bus. A user with crutches said, "The bus stops sometimes don't have roofs or seats. The sidewalks are also uneven, which makes it hard for people who use crutches. Sometimes getting to the stop is already a physical obstacle before you even get on the bus." This difference in technology and infrastructure also showed up as digital exclusion. The required non-cash payment system worked well for people who knew how to use it, but it was a big problem for people who were already in trouble. Program management was aware of this problem: "For the elderly, many are still confused by the non-cash payment. So sometimes they are helped by other passengers or the driver." For people with disabilities, the problems were even more complicated and serious. The person with crutches said that the payment process was very hard for them physically: "Sometimes the bus is already moving, and we're told to quickly scan the QRIS. But I'm using crutches, so I have to hold my crutches, hold my phone, and keep my balance. It feels like a life-or-death struggle."

There were also problems with the administration and technology. The system was supposed to give people with disabilities a special rate, but it often didn't work right. "Most of the time, the attendant just gives me the general QRIS code. So I pay the regular price, even though there's a disability tariff. Maybe the attendant doesn't know," the same user said. Also, the "Mitra Darat" app, even though it was advanced,

didn't give wheelchair users important information like which buses were accessible or when they would be running. "The app doesn't tell you which bus has wheelchair-accessible facilities or when an accessible bus will arrive. So sometimes you have to wait a long time, or you might not get one at all." In this way, technology, which was supposed to help everyone, ended up creating a new digital divide, separating people into those who could use it and those who couldn't.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results of the Teman Bus project in Mamminasata give us a lot of information about how top-down policy changes can affect complicated cities. When looked at through the lens of policy anthropology, the results show that there are deep conflicts between the state's efforts to modernise and the way people actually live in the area. This shows how important it is to have a more nuanced approach to urban governance.

### 5.1. The Conflict Between Modernity and Locality

The Teman Bus case is a great example of how a state-driven project to make things more logical can clash with the social and cultural practices that are already in place in a community. According to Shore and Wright (1997), policy is not just a set of rules; it is also a "cultural project" that tries to control people and make them into the perfect subject, like the well-behaved, tech-savvy public transport user. The Teman Bus program, which talks about modernisation, efficiency, and technology, is a perfect example of this technocratic logic.

But this project to modernise went against the local culture of mobility in Mamminasata. The *pete-pete* system is flexible, so passengers can stop anywhere and pay in cash. This is very different from the strict, rule-based system of Teman Bus. This clash caused a lot of cultural resistance. The refusal of *pete-pete* drivers to become "feeders" was not just an economic decision; it was also a rejection of the formal logic that was being forced on them. They didn't want to lose the freedom and flexibility that are at the heart of their work identity.

Users, on the other hand, did not just accept or reject the new system. They came up with hybrid strategies that let them use the flexible *pete-pete* or *ojek* to get to the fixed-route Teman Bus. This shows how people actively negotiate and fit new policies into the way things work in their own communities. This tension shows that modernisation projects that come from the top down often don't take into account "local knowledge" (like how users prefer direct routes) or "alternative authorities" that have been around for a long time (like the collective power of *Organda* on the streets). Not being able to talk to these people from the start shows a major flaw in a top-down policy approach that doesn't take into account the social and cultural context in which it will be put into action.

### 5.2. An Assessment of Fairness and Effectiveness in Implementation

Shore & Wright (1997) stress that policy should be judged not just "on paper," but also "in practice." For the BTS program, an effectiveness evaluation that only uses quantitative indicators like load factor has been very difficult. The results show that the central government used the fact that the load factor target was not met as an excuse to threaten service cuts, without taking into account the positive effects on users. An ethnographic study shows a big difference between what people think will happen and what actually happens. The bus fleet is very nice and clean, but the bus stops are broken, not big enough, and hard to get to. This is clear proof that a policy can look like it's working based on one measure but not give users a complete and comfortable experience.

We need to look at the fairness of the implementation from a social as well as an administrative point of view. This study clearly shows how the Teman Bus policy led to "inclusive exclusion," where groups are technically invited to use the service but face many barriers in practice. The elderly are the most obvious examples; they have trouble understanding the non-cash payment system. People with disabilities also have many problems. Not only do they have a hard time making non-cash transactions while the bus is moving, but they also often have to pay the regular fare because the attendants don't know enough about it and they can't find out about accessible bus schedules through the app.

This shows that using technology, which is seen as modern and efficient, has unintentionally created new ways for people to sort themselves socially. The policy gives power to the group that knows a lot about technology, but it also pushes the people on the other side of the digital divide to the edges. So, when judging a policy's effectiveness and fairness, we need to look at more than just technocratic numbers. We need to look at things like power, real accessibility, and the agency of the local community.

### 5.3. Lessons on how to copy policies and make them last

One important thing to learn from the anthropological approach to policy is that policies are not universal and can't be copied without changes. Shore and Wright (1997) say that every policy is a "negotiation arena" that is shaped by social ties, local history, and political symbols. This is a great example of how to do it in Mamminasata. The intense conflict with Organda, which included up to 15 protests, and the negotiations that followed, which forced changes to the routes, show how strong local factors can be in changing national policy. This shows that before copying the BTS policy in other areas, there needs to be a thorough study of the culture of mobility, informal power structures, and possible local conflicts.

Also, the way things are done in Mamminasata shows a major flaw in the "policy transfer" model. The central government came up with the program with the idea that after a few years, local governments would take over the financial responsibility. However, the results show that local governments are honest about how unprepared they are, both in terms of money and the lack of a strong local legal framework (like a Regional Regulation or Perda) to support the program. The biggest risk to the program is that people at the local level don't plan for financial and institutional stability. So, replication shouldn't just mean making the program bigger; it should mean changing the policy.

This new way of learning changes the paradigm from a "transfer model" to a "co-creation model" that is more dialogic and participatory. For other regions, this means that local actors (including representatives of informal transport) must be involved in the planning process from the start, work with the local government to come up with a realistic plan for financial sustainability, and make community feedback a key part of the policy design itself. If you don't take this context-sensitive approach, you run the risk of making the same mistakes and having the same problems with any policy.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Public transport systems are more than just technical infrastructure; they are also living, breathing cultural landscapes. The success or failure of a reform depends a lot on how well it fits with local values, habits, and knowledge. The introduction of Teman Bus in Mamminasata is a good example of this. The policy did create a new public space that could help make the city more connected and caring, but it didn't do anything about important issues like making sure everyone could use it and making sure the infrastructure would last.

Transport reforms that matter in the future need to go beyond the technocratic model. They need to take a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach, which includes: (1) Inclusive Design, making sure that payment technology and information systems are accessible to all groups, including the elderly and people with disabilities; (2) Strengthening Supportive Infrastructure that is friendly to all users, like good bus stops and safe pedestrian paths; and (3) Embracing and Facilitating Local Adaptation, like hybrid mobility strategies, as part of the solution, not as a problem to be solved. In the end, Teman Bus teaches us that making a good transport system isn't just about getting new buses; it's also about talking to the people who use them and understanding what they need.

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