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STREET ETHNOGRAPHY TO UNCOVER THE DYNAMICS OF URBAN MOBILITY

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Abstrak: Mobilitas perkotaan tidak hanya berkaitan dengan perpindahan fisik, tetapi juga mencerminkan dinamika sosial, ketimpangan akses, serta bentuk adaptasi warga terhadap struktur ruang kota. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana masyarakat menjalani dan menegosiasikan mobilitas di ruang publik kota Makassar melalui pendekatan etnografi jalanan. Dengan metode kualitatif dan teknik observasi partisipatif serta wawancara mendalam terhadap 12 informan, penelitian ini menemukan lima tema utama: jalanan sebagai ruang ekonomi dan sosial; ketimpangan akses terhadap mobilitas; kesenjangan digital; negosiasi ruang dan waktu; serta solidaritas sosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mobilitas tidak pernah netral—ia dipengaruhi oleh faktor struktural seperti infrastruktur, ekonomi, kebijakan, dan teknologi. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya keadilan mobilitas serta perlunya kebijakan transportasi yang inklusif dan berpihak pada kelompok marjinal. Kajian ini memberi kontribusi pada pengembangan studi antropologi perkotaan dan mengajak pembuat kebijakan untuk melihat ruang jalan sebagai ruang hidup, bukan sekadar jalur lalu lintas.
Kata Kunci: Mobilitas Perkotaan, Etnografi Jalanan, Ketimpangan Akses, Keadilan Ruang.

Abstract: *Urban mobility is not only related to physical displacement, but also reflects social dynamics, access inequality, and the form of adaptation of citizens to the spatial structure of the city. This research aims to reveal how people undergo and negotiate mobility in the public space of Makassar city through a street ethnographic approach. With qualitative methods and participatory observation techniques as well as in-depth interviews with 12 informants, this study found five main themes: the street as an economic and social space; inequality of access to mobility; the digital divide; negotiation of space and time; and social solidarity. The results show that mobility is never neutral—it is influenced by structural factors such as infrastructure, economy, policy, and technology. These findings underscore the importance of mobility equity and the need for inclusive and marginalized transportation policies. This study contributes to the development of urban anthropological studies and invites policymakers to see street spaces as living spaces, not just traffic lanes.*
Keywords: *Urban Mobility, Street Ethnography, Inequality Of Access, Spatial Justice.*

INTRODUCTION

Mobility in the city is not just about people moving from one point to another. It is a mirror of how the city works, breathes and interacts with its citizens. Behind the speeding vehicles, the pedestrian-filled sidewalks, and the informal workers moving from place to place, there is a rich and meaningful social dynamic. Mobility, in the context of cities, is the meeting point between infrastructure, policies, technology, and the daily experiences of citizens who move, navigate, and negotiate their living spaces.

In this context, the ethnographic approach of the street becomes very relevant. It not only offers observations about how people move, but also provides a deeper understanding of how urban space is used, who gets access, and who is left behind. This approach invites us to explore city life from the perspective of ordinary people—drivers, traders, pedestrians, and public transport users—who live and work on the streets every day.

Along with that, thinkers such as John Urry (2007) and Henri Lefebvre (1991) provide a strong theoretical framework for reading this phenomenon. Urry, through the concept of mobility, states that the movement of people, goods, and information is central to modern life, not just an additional activity (Downey, 2014; Jensen et al., 2018). Meanwhile, Lefebvre through The Production of Space, emphasizes that urban space is not a neutral empty container, but an arena in which power, economics, and social relations are constantly negotiating (K. Turhanoglu, 2014; SÁ, 2018).

Literature Review

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of mobility as an important dimension in urban life.

First, Sheller and Urry (2006) emphasize that mobility is not only physical, but also social, political, and symbolic. They highlight how mobility is connected to social inequality and access to resources (Borck & Wrede, 2018; Hertel & Groh-Samberg, 2019).

Second, Doreen Massey (1994) in Space, Place and Gender underlines how space is never free from power relations. In urban mobility, certain groups such as women, people with disabilities, or low-income communities often experience limited mobility space that other groups do not experience (Kalandides, 2020; Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2020).

Third, David Harvey (1989) through the concept of time-space compression explains how the acceleration of mobility due to capitalism and digital technology creates higher time

pressure for urban people. Urban people are required to be always fast, efficient, and mobile, but not everyone has the access or ability to meet these demands (Smart & Smart, 2008).

Fourth, Manuel Castells (1996) through The Rise of the Network Society introduced the idea that modern cities are shaped by information and communication networks. Today's mobility is not only determined by roads and vehicles, but also by digital networks, algorithms, and data that govern how people move (Fernández-Ardèvol & Ribera-Fumaz, 2023; Zhen et al., 2020).

Fifth, Marc Augé (1995) in Non-Places states that spaces such as stations, airports, and highways create an anonymous and uniform urban experience. Urban mobility in many big cities has lost its personal touch and local identity due to the pressure of globalization (Ahonen, 2015; Sá, 2014).

The five literature make an important contribution to understanding mobility as a complex phenomenon involving physical, social, and symbolic aspects. However, studies that specifically use a street ethnographic approach to explore the dynamics of mobility in urban public spaces, especially in the context of Indonesian cities, are still relatively limited.

Novelty and Implications of the Study

It is in that context that this study is present to bring novelty. Instead of relying on quantitative data or macro-structural approaches, the study focused on the daily experiences of street mobility actors—online motorcycle taxi drivers, street vendors, public transportation drivers, and public transportation users. Through a street ethnography approach, this research seeks to explore the social meanings, spatial negotiations, and inequality that they face directly in the field.

The implications of this approach are quite broad. First, academically, this study enriches the study of mobility by presenting voices and narratives from the street, which often go unnoticed by policymakers. Second, practically, these findings can be an important input for transportation policy and urban planning designers to understand that public spaces are not only to be traversed, but also to be inhabited, negotiated, and even maintained by marginalized groups. Third, socially, this study demonstrates the importance of mobility justice—the idea that access to decent movement should be the right of all city dwellers, regardless of economic or social status.

Concepts and Theories Used

To understand more deeply about urban mobility, this study uses three main theories.

The first is mobility as a network (networked mobility) from John Urry, who emphasizes that mobility is no longer just about vehicles and roads, but also about digital networks, algorithms, and information systems that shape human movement (Al-Eidi et al., 2020; Elliott & Urry, 2010; Oswald, 2016).

The second is the theory of space production from Henri Lefebvre, who sees the city as a space that is always reproduced through the interaction between power, economics, and social practices (K. Turhanoglu, 2014; Larsen & Brandt, 2018).

The third is the concept of access and spatial justice that has developed in the urban mobility literature, which emphasizes that mobility is not only a matter of efficiency, but also a matter of rights, access, and justice (Setianto & Gamal, 2021; Sotiropoulos, 2022).

These three frameworks come together in seeing the city as a living entity—consisting not only of roads and vehicles, but also of social relations, political tensions, and hopes for a better life. In street ethnography, these concepts find their applicative space. They help us see how road users experience the city not as a neutral space, but as an arena for contestation, negotiation, and even resistance

METODE PENELITIAN

This research uses a qualitative approach with a street ethnography method. This method was chosen because it can directly describe how mobility in urban public spaces is lived, felt, and negotiated by various community groups. The ethnographic approach makes room for concrete experiences and personal narratives that are often missed in quantitative or macrodata-based approaches. The main focus of this study is to capture the social dynamics that emerge on the streets of cities as an arena for interaction, work, and daily movement.

Location and Object of Study

The location of the research was carried out in the central area of Makassar, especially at several strategic points that became nodes for the daily movement of the community, such as the Malengkeri Terminal, Jalan Pengayoman, the Central Market area, and protocol road corridors such as Jalan Urip Sumoharjo and Jalan Perintis Kemerdekaan. These regions were chosen because they exhibit various forms of mobility, both formal and informal, and involve various actors with diverse social backgrounds. The streets of the city, in this context, are not

only places for vehicular traffic, but also economic, social, and even political spaces.

Research Informant

The informants in this study consisted of individuals who daily depend on street mobility to work or carry out their social activities. They were selected using purposive sampling techniques, which are based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. Informants include:

- Online motorcycle taxi driver (ojol)
- City transport driver (pete-pete)
- Lim foot trader
- Regular pedestrians (workers and students)
- Public transport users

The characteristics of informants are very diverse, in terms of age, work background, education, and the use of technology in their daily mobility. The number of informants interviewed in depth was 12 people, with participatory observations carried out on more than 30 interactions in the hallway.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected through three main techniques. First, is participatory observation, where researchers go directly to the field, walk down the sidewalk, take public transportation, and sit and talk at motorcycle taxi stops or bases. This observation was carried out to capture the real dynamics that occur in public spaces, including body expressions, spontaneous responses, and adaptation patterns of road users.

Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with the main informants. Interviews are conducted informally and flexibly, following a naturally occurring flow of conversation. The questions were open-ended and explored their subjective experiences of mobility, barriers, survival strategies, and their views on transport policy and the use of urban space.

Third, field documentation, including daily records, photos of street situations, and voice recordings as part of the field data recording process. This documentation reinforces the validity of the data and helps researchers reflect on the interaction process that has occurred.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed qualitatively through thematic techniques, namely by identifying the main patterns that emerged from observations and interviews. The researcher carried out a manual coding process, sorting and grouping data based on themes such as mobility access, spatial inequality, technological adaptation, and social dynamics in public spaces. These findings were then interpreted regarding the theories of John Urry, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey, to explain the relationship between mobility, space, and social inequality in the context of cities.

Research Time

This research was carried out during the period from August to November 2024. For approximately four months, the researchers conducted regular field observations, with an intensity of field visits of 3–4 times a week, depending on the dynamics of the location and the opportunity to meet directly with the informant. The process of transcription, daily reflection, and data processing was carried out simultaneously during the research period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that street mobility in urban areas, especially in Makassar, is not just an activity moving from one point to another. It is part of a life strategy, a form of adaptation, as well as a representation of the social and political dynamics of urban space. The results of the research are presented in five main themes, which are built from the process of participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and field documentation, then analyzed using the approaches of mobility theory (John Urry), space production (Henri Lefebvre), and time-space compression (David Harvey).

1) Streets as an Open but Vulnerable Social and Economic Space

In big cities, roads are not just infrastructure. It is alive and constantly changing, becoming a place of informal economic activity and intense social interaction. In this context, the streets become "people's spaces"—where those who do not have access to formal space can make a living (Martínez et al., 2017; Mohamed & van Ham, 2022).

A street vendor who used to sell on the sidewalk of Makassar Central Market said, *"I don't have a permanent shop. This street is where I look for food every day. But sometimes you have to shift if there is a raid or if many vehicles are passing by."

This statement shows that public spaces such as sidewalks are alternative spaces that are fluid—inhabited but also always threatened by regulation. This reinforces Lefebvre's theory that urban spaces are produced by power and that marginalized groups must constantly negotiate their existence in spaces that are not designed for them.

2) Inequality of Access to Mobility as a Structural Reality

This study found that access to mobility is uneven. This inequality arises geographically (central vs. suburban), economically (having a private vehicle vs. using public transportation), and digitally (having access to an app vs. not having a smartphone). This inequality is not the result of individual choices, but rather part of the social structure of the city that results in unequal accessibility.

An ojol driver said,

"If it is a suburban area, many roads are still damaged. So sometimes I refuse orders if I go too far there, afraid that the motorbike will break down and run out of time on the road." (Informant 03, male, 29 years old, Makassar, interview October 12, 2024)

This phenomenon represents how mobility capital (Urry) is the main determinant of movement. Those who have vehicles, access to information, and strategic locations will have superior mobility, while those who are left behind will experience impeded mobility—hampered in accessing space, time, and opportunities.

3) Digital Divide and Technology Adaptation: Non-Inclusive Access

Although transportation app technology has changed the face of urban mobility, not everyone can enjoy it equally. Those who don't have smartphones, internet data, or technical capabilities are left behind in the modern mobility system.

An informal worker complained, *"I don't have a sophisticated cellphone. So I'm still riding pete-pete. If someone else can order ojol through the application, I can just wait on the side of the road.

This reflects a technological paradox: on the one hand it unlocks efficiency, but on the other hand it creates digital exclusion. In Urry's perspective, this strengthens social stratification in the era of networked society where connectivity is a tool of control as well as a privilege.

4) Time as a Commodities: Negotiating Space-Time in Daily Mobility

Time in the lives of urban people has now become very precious, even more than money. Residents living in the suburbs have to pay a heavy price in the form of long and tiring travel times.

"I have to leave at five in the morning because if I pass by it, the road will start to be congested. If you are a little late, you may not get a seat on the bus and arrive late for work."

(Informant 07, female, 36 years old, Tamalanrea, observation and interview, September 23, 2024)

This affirms Harvey's theory of time-space compression, in which modern cities encourage the acceleration of life, but do not provide a fair tool for all of its citizens. Time becomes a space of struggle: who can control his time, has control over life; others have to adapt or be marginalized.

5) Street Solidarity and Social Identity Production

Amid inequality and urban pressure, the street space is also a place for social solidarity and collective identity to grow. Street space users, from drivers to traders, to passengers, often form informal relationships that support each other.

"We know each other between the drivers. If one strikes, the others will help. On this road, we are like brothers."

(Informant 09, male, 45 years old, public transportation driver, interview September 18, 2024)

This shows that the public space is not completely controlled by market logic or state control. In it, there is still room for empathy, familiarity, and even symbolic resistance to oppressive systems.

Theoretical Affirmations and Implications of Findings

These findings strengthen the position of Urry's mobility theory in the context of Global South cities, especially in Indonesia. Mobility is not just a technical activity, but also a reflection of social structures, power, and resistance. With a street ethnographic approach, this study presents the face of the city from below: not just data, but lived experiences.

In practical terms, this study emphasizes the importance of inclusive transportation policy design, fairness, and orientation to the experience of ordinary citizens, not just vehicle

efficiency. The concept of mobility justice is an urgency that cannot be ignored if the city wants to develop without leaving its citizens behind.

Table of Key Findings

No.	Theme Findings	Short Description
1	Streets as socio-economic spaces	The road is a place to make a living for informal traders, but it is full of uncertainty due to regulation.
2	**Inequality of access to mobility**	Groups in the suburbs experience mobility difficulties due to poor infrastructure and long distances.
3	Adaptation to transportation technology	Access to digital transportation applications creates a gap between technology and non-technology users.
4	Negotiation of space and time in mobility	Workers from the suburbs had to sacrifice rest time to avoid congestion and congested transportation.
5	Solidarity and social identity on the streets	Road users form informal communities and solidarity between drivers and traders.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research shows that street mobility in cities is not just a physical movement, but a social practice full of meaning, negotiation, and inequality. Streets become living spaces that bring together a variety of interests—between individuals seeking a livelihood, city policies that shape access to space, and technologies that help create new boundaries between the connected and the left behind. Through a street ethnographic approach, the face of the city looks much more complex than that reflected in statistical data or transportation maps.

The main objective of the research to understand how mobility is lived and negotiated by urban communities is successfully answered through various narratives and experiences of residents who depend on the streets daily. During the hustle and bustle of vehicles and the tension of public space, it can be seen that marginalized groups continue to adapt to all limitations, both economically, infrastructurally, and technologically. However, behind that

pressure, there is also solidarity, survival strategies, and creativity that form the unique character of city life.

These findings confirm that mobility is not just about moving, but also about who can move, where, how, and in what context of power. In an unevenly produced space, people still create small spaces to survive, support each other, and even negotiate their existence in a city that is constantly changing. Therefore, understanding mobility means understanding urban life in its entirety—from policy logic to the voices of those living on the streets.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several things can be recommended as a follow-up both in the academic, practical, and public policy realms. These suggestions are not only based on the results of field observations but are also a reflection on the importance of making mobility an issue that is more than just a technical matter of transportation.

First, for the development of academic studies, more ethnographic studies are needed that directly touch the experiences of residents in mobility spaces. Cities cannot be understood only through technocratic approaches or statistical figures. Future studies should combine ethnographic perspectives with spatial and digital data to be able to capture the reality of the city more fully—both structurally and narratively.

Second, for policymakers, this study recommends the importance of building a mobility system that is equitable, not only efficient. This can start by developing inclusive public transportation policies, taking into account the needs of vulnerable groups such as informal workers, non-digital users, and residents of suburban areas. Transportation infrastructure should not only be oriented to vehicles, but also to pedestrians, cyclists, and residents' activity spaces that are often excluded from urban planning.

Third, practically, a participatory dialogue forum is needed between city governments, digital transportation service providers, and communities of residents who are directly affected by mobility policies. Citizen participation in policy-making will provide space for real experiences to help shape the direction of a more just and humane city.

Fourth, for the scientific development of urban anthropology, the street ethnography approach can continue to be developed as a method that is sensitive to micro-dynamics but full of meaning. Future research can further explore the culture of space, symbols on the streets, and the relationships between identities formed during daily citizens' movements.

Finally, this advice is also addressed to urban space activists and civil society: it is important to continue to guard street spaces as living public spaces, not just vehicle lanes. The street is a meeting space, a space of struggle, and a living space. So maintaining a diversity of activities and ensuring equal access to them is a tangible form of building a more humane city.

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