

Cosmopolitan Makassar: Continuing the Ambiguity of Indonesia's Modern Cities

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the formation of modernity in Makassar City during the first two decades of the 21st century within the framework of contemporary urban spatial transformation. This period is marked by modern projects such as the revitalization of Losari Beach, coastal reclamation, the development of the Center Point of Indonesia area, the smart city program, and the hosting of international festivals. These efforts constitute a form of promoting Makassar as a “world city” that is cosmopolitan and globally competitive. This research aims to explain how these modernity projects are manifested, negotiated, and reproduced within a historical context. It analyzes the ongoing efforts of the city government, the business sector, and various communities in shaping a cosmopolitan Makassar in the 21st century. The study uses historical methods, including heuristics (collecting archives, policy documents, media reports, and interviews), source criticism, contextual interpretation, and historiographical reconstruction. The analysis is conducted diachronically to trace the continuity of previous developmental legacies, and synchronically to examine the power relations among various stakeholders. The results show the existence of contradictions as a tangible form of urban modernity. Makassar's modernization reproduces the old spatial pattern—that is, the separation between the modern center and the underdeveloped periphery—while presenting a performative cosmopolitanism focused on image and symbolism. Modernity follows global aesthetic trends and market demands; however, this condition results in evident social and ecological inequalities. This research contributes to the historiography of Indonesian urban history by positioning Makassar City as an important case outside of the Java-centric narrative and offering the concept of “ambiguous modernity” as an inherent characteristic of postcolonial cities, not merely as a policy anomaly.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 21st century, Makassar emerged as one of the most dynamic cities in Eastern Indonesia. As the main gateway and economic center of the region, Makassar has undergone a rapid transformation into a modern and cosmopolitan city. The city government, private sector, and various community

groups have worked together to create a new image for the city through infrastructure projects, coastal revitalization, development of public spaces, and the promotion of a new identity as an open, innovative, and globally competitive world city. Over the past two decades, Makassar's narrative of modernity has been strongly expressed through slogans, festivals, and the physical

development of the city that represent the spirit of urban progress.

However, behind the rhetoric of progress, Makassar also presents a paradoxical face. The city's rapid growth has exposed the gap between the center and the periphery, between grand physical development and fragile social realities. New areas have emerged as symbols of urban prosperity, while older neighborhoods face spatial pressures and environmental degradation. The modernity being pursued seems not yet fully inclusive—indeed, it tends to create exclusive spaces that reinforce social and economic boundaries among city residents. On the other hand, community groups are striving to negotiate their identities amid the growing currents of globalization and urban space capitalization. Alongside the process of urban modernization, various urban issues have emerged, especially poverty, unemployment, and the spread of slum settlements (Fitrianti et al., 2021).

This situation shows that Makassar, like many postcolonial cities in Southeast Asia, is experiencing an ambiguous process between the desire to become modern and the various urban issues that accompany it. The city is not just a stage for physical development, but also a space of negotiation between tradition and modernity, between economic interests and social sustainability. Efforts to make Makassar a cosmopolitan city reveal tensions between image and reality, between top-down modernization projects and bottom-up urban dynamics (Kusno, 2000; Nas, 2011).

This condition seems to be a continuation of the developmental atmosphere that dominated the previous century. The massive modernization promoted by the New Order regime required people to live within the boundaries of a combination of private and public-private spaces, leaving behind the poor, who were ignored in urban modernization. This situation arose as a result of inconsistent urban planning implementation. Furthermore, planning was always defeated by the pragmatic interests of capital owners. There is almost no

continuity of urban planning from one regime to the next. Therefore, until the end of the 20th century, the City of Makassar exhibited the ambiguity of modernity, much like most other cities in Indonesia. Contemporary building structures add an interesting nuance to certain areas, yet the cityscape is still dominated by a dualistic landscape, namely between the traditional and the modern, the formal and the informal, as well as the rich and the poor (Makkelo, 2018; Surya et al., 2020).

This article examines the ambiguities of modernity from a historical perspective. By analyzing the development of Makassar in the first two decades of the 21st century, it explores how the city's modernity projects have been articulated, negotiated, and implemented by various actors: the government, the private sector, and urban communities. A historical approach allows us to understand that the "failure" or "imperfection" of Makassar's modernity is not merely the result of policies, but rather an inherent part of the city's historical process as it continues to define itself between globality and locality, between dreams of becoming modern and a reality still bound by the complexities of urban social life. This is similar to studies that combine historical reconstruction and social perspectives, such as the research Lukitaningsih & Swandhani (2024) in Medan, which demonstrates socio-historical analysis in urban studies.

Studies on urban development in Indonesia over the past two decades show that urban modernity is not only related to physical and economic developments, but also to the creation of social and symbolic meanings of 'progress'. In this context, various studies position the city as an arena where ideas of modernity are produced, negotiated, and often debated.

Several key works, such as those by Kusno (2000, 2013), highlight how modernization projects in Indonesian cities—especially Jakarta—are often marked by tensions between the state's developmental vision and the social realities of urban residents. The city becomes a space where the politics of representation and

memory operate simultaneously, shaping visions of the future while obscuring social traces of the past. Comparisons with Jakarta's urban social geography reveal that patterns of fragmentation and spatial experience, and modernity itself, are often not just local issues but also characteristics of contemporary major Indonesian cities (Simone, 2010). Likewise, King (1990) explains how colonial legacies continue to influence postcolonial urban spatial configurations and imaginations, including in Southeast Asia. The postcolonial urbanism perspective asserts that urbanization in Southeast Asia produces forms of urban development not wholly reducible to Western models (Bishop, 2003). In Southeast Asian studies, Douglass (2010) urbanization is shown as a form of global-local negotiation, which is relevant for interpreting Makassar's transformation as part of broader regional patterns.

In their study of cosmopolitan cities, Skvirskaja & Humphrey (2012) they emphasize that cosmopolitanism is not just openness to the world, but also a social process involving negotiations of identity, class, and power within urban spaces. On the other hand, Roy & Ong (2011) the concept of 'flexible citizenship' shows how contemporary Asian cities develop new forms of global citizenship and mobility that often transcend the boundaries of nation-states. Cosmopolitanism promoted through massive urban development and modern buildings demonstrates a strategy of symbolic differentiation that is common in Southeast Asian cities. In many cases, cosmopolitanism is not always synonymous with inclusivity, but rather becomes a form of "urban branding" targeting the middle class and global investors (Bunnell, 2013; Roy & Ong, 2011).

In the Indonesian context, several studies on Makassar, such as those by Najib (2017), highlight transformations in the early 21st century, marked by rapid infrastructure development, expansion of commercial areas, and the emergence of creative communities that contribute to urban spaces. These studies underscore the contradictions between economic growth

and social justice, between the rhetoric of a "global city" and the social realities on the ground, which reveal inequality and exclusion. This condition gives rise to what is referred to as the "wounded city." (Schneider, Jane & Ida Susser, 2003).

Further study Colombijn (2014) discusses the politics of space in the development of urban areas and housing during the decolonization era in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Surya et al. (2020) examine the transformation of new urban areas from a sustainability perspective, while Setiawan et al. (2024) paying attention to the integration of local culture in smart city policies. In another study, Makkelo (2018) places Makassar's modernity within the historical context of the 20th century. Although they make important contributions, most of these studies tend to be sectoral and focus on technocratic planning, environmental impacts, or contemporary social dynamics, without systematically linking them to the historical dimension and the discourse of modernity that envelops them.

This study not only examines the impact of development or transformation of urban space, but also analyzes how projects such as the revitalization of Losari Beach, reclamation of the Centre Point of Indonesia (CPI), the Smart City program, and the F8 Festival are produced as narratives of modernity and cosmopolitanism between 2000 and 2024.

Unlike previous studies that emphasized technocratic planning aspects, ecological impacts, and uneven spatial change, this research positions the modernity of Makassar as a complex and ambiguous historical process. By combining a diachronic historical approach with contemporary discourse analysis, this study offers a new explanation of how the "Makassar world city" project reproduces old power patterns in more modern, aesthetic, and symbolic forms.

Comparatively, the dynamics visible in Makassar are also a phenomenon in other world cities. The development of coastal areas, beach reclamation, and the production of the world city image seen in Makassar reflect patterns similar to those found in

other postcolonial cities in Southeast Asia. Studies on “worlding cities” (Roy & Ong, 2011) show that many cities in Asia are built through spectacular projects, global branding, and mega infrastructure as a way of negotiating positions in the global hierarchy. In this context, Makassar can be seen as part of a broader urban phenomenon, as in Kuala Lumpur through the KLCC (Kuala Lumpur City Centre) project (Bunnell, 2004), in Manila, through the reclamation of Manila Bay (Shatkin, 2008), or in Jakarta, through the development of coastal areas and commercial superblocks (Hudalah & Firman, 2012; Silver, 2008). These studies indicate that urbanization in Southeast Asia highlights the complexity of urban governance, social fragmentation, and diverse global aspirations between different cities (Padawangi, 2019). This study not only enriches local historiography but also contributes to debates on postcolonial modernity in Southeast Asia.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in three aspects. First, empirically, this study enriches Indonesian urban historiography by presenting Makassar as an important case study outside of Java-centric narratives, while also highlighting the dynamics of the largest city in eastern Indonesia in the context of 21st-century globalization. Second, methodologically, this article bridges historical methods (heuristics, source criticism, and historiographical reconstruction) with an analysis of contemporary representations, allowing for a more comprehensive reading of urban modernity projects. Third, conceptually, this study introduces the idea of “ambiguous modernity” as a character of postcolonial cities—that is, a modernity continually projected through global images, symbols, and aesthetics, but simultaneously giving rise to spatial and social inequality, as well as ambivalent identities.

Thus, this study aims to contribute to the discourse on the development of Makassar City by highlighting the historical and cultural dimensions of Makassar’s modernity. It explores how efforts to become

a modern and cosmopolitan city actually maintain the historical legacy of the colonial era and the New Order regime, while adapting to the demands of 21st-century globalization. Based on this background, the study poses the following research question: how is the project of modernity in Makassar City in the period 2000–2024 produced, reproduced, represented, and negotiated within the narrative of cosmopolitanism by various urban actors? This question frames Makassar not simply as a story of development success or failure, but rather as a historical process that is continually negotiated. The city emerges as a space where global aspirations, colonial memory, economic interests, and the everyday practices of its residents intertwine in forms that are never entirely stable. A modernity that is always in an ambiguous state.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a critical urban history approach that combines urban historical methods with sociocultural analysis of the representations and practices of modernity in Makassar City during the first two decades of the 21st century. This approach is grounded in the argument that a city is not merely a collection of physical buildings or infrastructure, but also a product of historical social, economic, and symbolic relations. Therefore, every form of urban change always contains an ideological dimension—that is, how the past is interpreted to legitimize the image and direction of current development.

Temporally, this study examines the period from 2000 to 2024. The year 2000 is chosen as a starting point because it marks the phase of consolidation of decentralization and the broad implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia, which at the same time marks the end of the centralistic regime that ruled for about 30 years until the end of the 20th century. Meanwhile, the year 2024 is used as the study’s endpoint to read the latest dynamics of reclamation projects, modern city development, and the narrative of “Makassar as a world city.” Spatially, the research focuses on areas of urban

development and modernization, as well as arenas where urban modernity is performed. These include Losari Beach, the reclamation area of Center Point of Indonesia (CPI) and Tanjung Bunga, as well as adjacent neighborhoods that represent the other side of the modernization project, characterized by densely populated,

disorganized, and underdeveloped areas, especially in Mariso, Ujung Pandang, and their surroundings. The selection of locations was based on their significance to development projects, expressions of modernity, and affected areas. The research areas are shown in the following map.

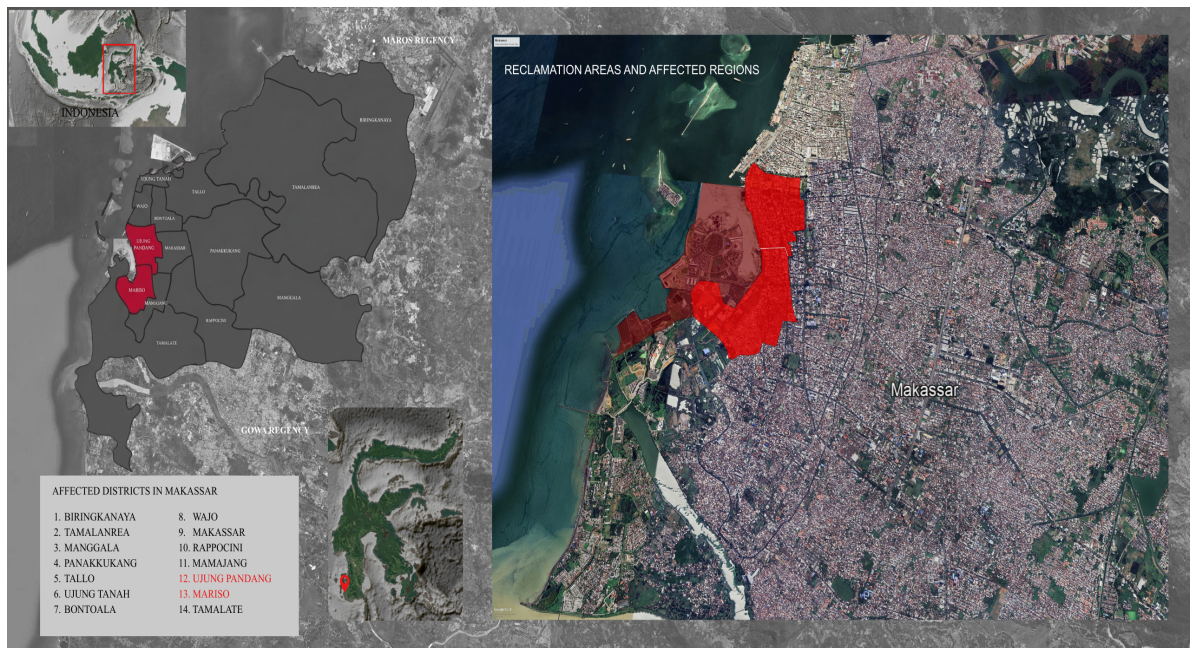


Figure 1. Map of the research area
(Source: Google Earth-2026. <https://earth.google.com/web>)

The research data were obtained from three main types of sources. First, archival sources and official documents, which include: [Regional Spatial Plans \(RTRW\) published throughout the 2000s-2020s archives from the Makassar City Tourism Office \(2015-2022\)](#); as well as reports from civil society organizations such as [WALHI South Sulawesi \(2018, 2020\)](#), and articles/news in the city's main print media: *Harian Fajar* and *Tribun Timur*. Second, this research conducted interviews with informants directly involved in modernization development activities, city residents affected by and connected to these activities, including city government officials, property developers, creative community actors, as well as fishers and street vendors around Losari Beach and residents living in Mariso and Ujung Pandang areas. Third, field observations were conducted in stages throughout 2023-

2024 at the research locations. The observations were both non-participatory and limited participatory, focusing on the practice of public space usage and citizen interactions in the research areas.

Data analysis was carried out in three interrelated stages. First, a historical-diachronic analysis with source criticism, tracing the continuity and changes in development policies from the onset of decentralization to the period of 'world city' branding. Second, thematic analysis of interview and observation data to identify main categories such as "world city narrative." Third, critical discourse analysis to examine how terms such as "modern city" and "smart city" are produced, repeated, and institutionalized in official documents, media, and city promotional materials. This analysis aims to reveal the power relations behind image production and how these images shape spatial practices.

As a historical study, this research adopts both diachronic and synchronic analyses: diachronic to trace the continuities and changes in Makassar's modernization project from the late 20th to the early 21st century; synchronic to understand how various actors—government, private sector, and community groups—simultaneously play roles in shaping the spaces and meanings of the contemporary city.

This approach is also interdisciplinary, combining perspectives from history, urban anthropology, and cultural studies. The historical perspective provides a chronological and analytical foundation for changes in urban policy and spatial planning; urban anthropology is used to understand the social dynamics and daily practices of city residents, while cultural studies help analyze symbols, narratives, and discourses that construct the city's 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan' image.

The research scope is not limited to the physical aspects of the city, but also includes social and imaginative spaces—namely, how Makassar is imagined, promoted, and lived by its citizens as a modern and global city.

The research framework is built on three analytical stages: 1) historical reconstruction of policy changes and spatial projects to trace the relationships between development policy, the city's historical memory, and the formation of modernity; 2) analysis of the narratives of modernity and cosmopolitanism to understand how the ideas of the 'modern city' and 'cosmopolitan city' are shaped through language, symbols, and practices; and 3) comparative synthesis with literature on postcolonial Southeast Asian cities. These three stages enable the integration of historical data, field observations, and visual representation analysis.

The conceptual foundation of this research is based on three ideas: urban modernity, cosmopolitanism, and postcolonial ambiguity. Modernity, in the urban context, is understood not only as technological advancement and infrastructure development, but also as a symbolic project aimed at restructuring

space and society according to the ideals of rationality, order, and efficiency (Harvey, 1989b). In the context of Makassar, development projects such as coastal reclamation, tourism area revitalization, and the creation of public spaces represent efforts to realize a local version of modernity. However, as Kusno (2013) points out, modernity in Indonesian cities often becomes an arena of tension between the desire to appear progressive and social realities that do not always support it.

In Makassar, the concept of cosmopolitanism is associated with how the city presents itself as a global city open to the outside world (Ahmadin et al., 2024). Yet, cosmopolitanism is not only linked to ethnic or cultural diversity, but also to the circulation of capital, ideas, and lifestyles (Appadurai, 1996). Furthermore, as (Hanerz, 1990) explains, cosmopolitanism also has an ambiguous side—it can open space for intercultural dialogue, but can also reinforce social exclusion through symbols of luxury and consumption. In the context of Makassar, this is reflected in the emergence of exclusive spaces that claim to be part of the global world, while at the same time widening social gaps within the city.

As a port city with a long colonial history, Makassar carries the legacy of complex social and spatial structures (Rahim & Abbas, 2024). A postcolonial perspective allows us to understand that the city's modernity is not entirely new, but rather interwoven with colonial memories and old power structures (Chakrabarty, 2000). The ambivalence of Makassar as a "modern city" can be seen as a reflection of the dual position of postcolonial cities; on one hand, they aspire to stand equal to global cities, while on the other, they remain bound by historical legacies and unresolved social contradictions. As discussed Setiadi et al. (2022) regarding urban growth in Java, Makassar's transformation can also be read as a synthesis of colonial structural heritage and contemporary capital dynamics.

By combining these three frameworks, this paper positions Makassar as a case study for understanding the realization of modernity as part of a historical process, not

as an anomaly. The city reflects broader dynamics of how modernity in the postcolonial world is always unstable, full of negotiations, and continuously reshapes the identity of the city and its inhabitants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Urban Spatial Development and the Ambiguity of Modernity

The transformation of Makassar since the early 21st century must be understood as a continuation and recontextualization of the city's role as a colonial port and regional trading hub. Makassar is rooted in maritime and multiethnic traditions that have developed since the era of the Gowa-Tallo Kingdom, the Dutch East Indies period, up to the early 20th century, forming the city's symbolic capital: a capacity for trade networks, social diversity, and its strategic position in eastern Indonesia (Makkelo, 2018; Poelinggomang, 2002). Makassar developed as a strategic port city connecting eastern Indonesia with global trade networks. This historical position shapes the city's identity as a meeting space for economic and cultural exchanges, which, in the contemporary period, is reproduced through narratives of cosmopolitanism and

large-scale development projects. This symbolic capital, in the post-reform decentralization era (Bintang et al., 2025; Sirajuddin, 2010), has been used by local elites as the foundation for positioning Makassar as the 'Gateway to Eastern Indonesia' within the new global economic architecture.

The Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW) 2000–2015 and the Makassar City Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2015–2026) established two policy directions: strengthening the city's image as a service and trade center through port, infrastructure modernization and reorienting the economy towards tourism, services, and property. Among the symbolic projects that have emerged are the revitalization of Losari Beach with the construction of a pier and the monumental installation 'M-A-K-A-S-S-A-R' as a symbol of modern aspirations. This effort aims to present Makassar as a city on par with major cities in Southeast Asia, attracting both investment and tourists. Local mass media hailed this as the "emergence of modern Makassar" and the affirmation of a new aesthetic (Harian Fajar, 2006; Tribun Timur, 2008).



Figure 2. Modernization of Losari Beach.

(Source: [Source: https://corryhp.wordpress.com/2013/04/21/makassar-4-7-april-2013](https://corryhp.wordpress.com/2013/04/21/makassar-4-7-april-2013))

However, this physical transformation has also brought about significant social changes and conflicts of interest. Field observations and interviews with street vendors, as well as reports from NGOs such as Walhi Sulawesi Selatan (Walhi is an Indonesian non-governmental environmental organization and part of the Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) network, and the largest environmental non-profit organization in Indonesia), reveal the marginalization of informal economic activities, restrictions on access for coastal communities, and the loss of living space for traditional fishermen in Losari and Mariso as a result of reclamation and redevelopment of the Losari area. The rise of commercial projects along Jalan Penghibur and Metro Tanjung Bunga marks the city's shift from a traditional port orientation to a service, residential, and entertainment economy, but also produces spaces that are aesthetic, orderly, and consumptive—often at odds with traditional social practices (Ahmadin, 2023). A resident living in Mariso near the reclamation area stated: “in the past, we could go straight to the sea, look for fish or gather the many shellfish on the coast, but now access is very limited, and many areas don't feel like they're meant for ordinary residents, especially for those of us who live in the surrounding residential neighborhoods” (Interview, 2024).

This phenomenon aligns with the theoretical framework of urban entrepreneurialism—namely, the city government's efforts and strategies to manage space as a commodity to attract investment and enhance global competitiveness (Harvey, 1989). The concept of ‘modernity without citizens’ (Kusno, 2013) becomes relevant in the context of Makassar, where modernity is produced through symbols and monumental infrastructure, but is not always accompanied by an expansion of citizen participation in the planning process. Modernity appears as an aesthetic and a global image, yet public involvement remains limited to the use of space, not the production of policy.

Urban modernity is not only about physical development, but also changes in rights and access to urban space. Urban policies that adopt market logic to build competitiveness and image tend to produce winners—investors, the service sector, and the urban middle class—while, on the other hand, the losers are informal traders, fishermen, and coastal communities who lose their livelihoods and access to public spaces. In this regard, until the 21st century, Asian cities generally have not demonstrated effective ways to overcome the dominance of multinational corporations. No alternative concepts have emerged that can replace urban development paradigms, which are now dominated by the capitalist-liberal ideology brought to Asia by the wave of globalization (Santoso, 2006).

This reality shows that the transformation of Losari Beach and CPI is part of the phenomenon Shatkin (2011) referred to as “mega-project urbanism”—large-scale developments functioning as tools for image production and global competitiveness. In Singapore, the development of Marina Bay aimed not only to expand economic space but also to create a visual icon representing the city-state's modernity (Yeoh, 2003). Similarly, in Kuala Lumpur, projects like the Petronas Twin Towers have become symbols of Malaysia's global aspirations (Bunnell, 2004). Shatkin's (2008) study also highlights how extraordinary projects such as integrated mega-projects in Asia have become urban advancement priorities. On a different scale, Makassar displays a similar pattern through the revitalization of Losari Beach and CPI reclamation, the construction of business and entertainment centers, and the development of the Tanjung Bunga residential area as a showcase of modernity. However, unlike Singapore and Kuala Lumpur—which are supported by strong fiscal and institutional capacities—Makassar's modernity coexists with more evident social inequality in its surrounding areas. This comparison shows that the ambiguity of modernity is not merely a matter of city government policy, but a

general feature of postcolonial cities attempting to “go global” through spectacular spatial aesthetics and projects.

In the first decade of this century, Makassar faced the paradox of modernity. On one hand, there were strategic efforts by local elites to change the city’s image and economic base to remain relevant in the era of globalization. On the other hand, there was social exclusion, indicating that the modernity being constructed was based more on image and economic value than on inclusive social transformation. The transformation of the Losari area into an icon of modernity illustrates how traditional public spaces can be turned into showcases for urban policy – presenting a modern face while concealing the historical claims of coastal communities to their spaces. The transformation of Makassar’s coastal areas through reclamation and the development of public spaces is not merely a reflection of infrastructural needs, but is a project of visualizing modernity. Urban space is produced as an image through new taglines, pedestrian areas, and architectural icons. The goal is to assert Makassar’s position as a global city in eastern Indonesia. From an urban geography perspective, this practice can be understood as a form of “speculative urbanism” where the construction of space becomes an instrument in inter-city competition (Goldman, 2011). This condition is clearly evident in the gentrification of the Losari and Tanjung Bunga coastal areas through various modern space development and beach reclamation projects (Avni & Moser, 2026).

Entering the second decade of the 21st century, Makassar’s modernization project went through a phase of accelerated development under the leadership of Mayor Ilham Arief Sirajuddin (2004–2014), and later Danny Pomanto (2014–2024). The city government aggressively promoted infrastructure construction, transportation improvements, and the development of new areas through policies such as “Makassar Kota Dunia” (Makassar World City), Makassar Sombere’, and the Smart City initiative (Setiawan et al., 2024). Archives from the [Regional Development Planning](#)

[Agency \(Bappeda\) of Makassar City \(2015–2019\)](#) show that the main urban development agenda during this period included: 1) The development of the reclaimed ‘Center Point of Indonesia (CPI)’ area as a new space for global investment and the provincial government center; 2) The construction of the Makassar City Promenade (wharf) as the main tourism hub and the 99 Domes Mosque as a symbol of spiritual modernity; 3) The digitalization of public services and city branding as ‘Makassar Kota Dunia’. This new image was further reinforced through international festivals such as the Makassar International Eight Festival and Forum (F8), which showcased the idea of local cosmopolitanism. According to F8 organizers (2022), the event’s concept was designed to ‘combine tradition and globality in a single aesthetic urban space’ (Interview, 2025).

However, behind these projects, the city also faces social and ecological tensions. Studies [Najib \(2017\)](#) show a growing inequality between the northern and southern parts of the city, as well as the ecological impacts of coastal development. Civil society organizations have criticized CPI and similar projects for neglecting environmental sustainability principles and public participation. From the perspective of postcolonial theory ([Chakrabarty, 2000](#)), this phenomenon shows how Makassar reproduces colonial power structures – specifically, the separation between a modern (elite, planned) center and traditional (marginalized, neglected) peripheries. In other words, the city is ‘becoming modern’ in old patterns. This is a top-down modernity that disregards dynamics from below. Makassar’s case demonstrates that the development of modern spaces results in spatial fragmentation similar to patterns seen in Jakarta, Manila, and Bangkok, where modern economic centers coexist alongside informal areas. From a critical geography viewpoint, this phenomenon is understood as a consequence of neoliberalism, which extends market logic into urban governance ([Leitner et al., 2007](#); [Peck et al., 2013](#)).



Figure 3. The atmosphere of the F8 Festival with the 99-Dome Mosque in the background. (Source: <https://beritakotamakassar.fajar.co.id/2023/01/29/f-8-kembali-masuk-ken-2023-tahun-ini-akan-digelar-agustus/>)

Symbolically, this is also reflected in the city's visual representations. Official posters and tourism promotions (Makassar City Tourism Office Archives, 2015–2022) constantly highlight tall buildings, waterfronts, and major highways, while traditional social spaces such as markets, fishing villages, and public ports gradually fade from the official imagery of the city. This illustrates what Appadurai (1996) is called the “aesthetics of aspiration”—a beauty constructed from the desire to be global, rather than from real social experience.

This second decade was marked by new challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) brought much of the city's economic activity to a halt and exposed Makassar's urban system's vulnerabilities. Unemployment surged, and incomes fell in the informal sector. On the other hand, the city government continued to promote the

smart city narrative through digitalization projects. As a metropolitan city, Makassar is considered to face complex problems, requiring innovative and sustainable solutions to address its issues through the implementation of the smart city concept. This is reflected in the adoption of information technology innovations in planned programs (Mas et al., 2025; Nurdiassa et al., 2021).

Referring to the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2021–2026, the development focus is on “integration between digital economic development and social welfare.” However, in practice, most city residents still feel marginalized from new public spaces that are overly commercial and “unwelcoming to ordinary people” (Interview, 2024). From field observations (2025), the ambiguity of Makassar's modernity becomes even clearer: the city appears modern in image, but is

fragile in social reality. On one hand, projects like CPI and F8 have become symbols of prestige; on the other, classic problems such as traffic congestion, flooding, and spatial inequality are increasingly prominent (Bissell, 2023). This phenomenon aligns with Harvey's (1989) the analysis of 'urban entrepreneurialism', in which cities are treated as commodities to be sold to investors and tourists, while residents' social interests are neglected in favor of economic appeal. This is consistent with neoliberal frameworks that highlight how large projects often legitimize spatial growth while producing exclusion—a phenomenon observed in the transformation of space in Makassar City (Peck et al., 2013).

From the chronological description above, it is clear that Makassar's modernity project cannot be understood as simply a success or failure. It is a historical process, continually negotiated by various actors with different interests. In the postcolonial context, Makassar is a classic example of a city that "strives to be modern" yet remains hampered by old logics—in terms of power structures, spatial imagination, and social relations.

Primary sources such as government archives, media reports, and field observations show that every urban development project always contains layers of particular discourses and ideologies. Meanwhile, secondary sources such as Kusno (2000, 2013), King (1990), and Ong (2011) provide a conceptual framework that the ambiguity of modernity is not a deviation, but rather an inherent feature in the history of contemporary Asian cities. As seen in Ilham's (2019) study on Indonesian cities, urban modernization ultimately reveals the 'irony of modernity'. This condition is formed as an accumulation of 'disappointments' toward the modernization process. It gives rise to cultural anomie, alienation, or the marginalization of urban residents within

modern culture. This occurs due to 'inequalities' in various forms, such as injustice, powerlessness, neglect, or an inability to adapt to the new era.

Therefore, Makassar's ambiguity—between modernity and marginality, cosmopolitanism and exclusion—serves as an important reflection for the study of urban history in Indonesia: modern cities are never finished, but always remain arenas of negotiation between dreams and realities.

Massive Development, Negotiated Spaces

The development of the Tanjung Bunga and CPI (Center Point of Indonesia) areas since the 2010s is the clearest example of the shift in spatial logic in Makassar. Major reclamation projects on the city's southern coast, carried out by PT Ciputra Surya Tbk and later continued by PT Yasmin Bumi Asri, have created new areas for elite housing, luxury hotels, and the provincial government center.

Makassar City Government projects CPI as a "leap toward a global city," where "Makassar is no longer just a regional city, but a world city." Aiming to beautify the urban landscape, various large-scale projects, including coastal reclamation and public space development, have been implemented. However, the simultaneous and intensive pace of urban development has also brought a variety of challenges related to urban land use and environmental issues (Rohadi et al., 2024). Reports from Walhi South Sulawesi (2010, 2017) and an investigation by Tempo (Juni 2, 2017) Tempo reveal significant social and ecological impacts: destruction of coastal ecosystems, displacement of fishing communities in Barombong and Tanjung Merdeka, and increased sedimentation at the Jeneberang River estuary. In many coastal city transformations across Southeast Asia, spatial challenges and socio-ecological risks show parallels to the dynamics observed in Makassar City (Douglass & Miller, 2018).



Figure 4. Indonesia Central Point Project (CPI). CPI project model (top); CPI construction process (bottom) (Source: <https://makassar.tribunnews.com/2019/05/24/reklamasi-cpi-rampung-ini-fokus-pembangunan-citraland-city-losari-sekarang> <https://properti.kompas.com/read/2015/05/15/073946721/Resmi.Megaprojek.Center.Point.of.Indonesia.Jatuh.ke.Tangan.Ciputra>)

This phenomenon illustrates what Appadurai (1996) is referred to as the "aesthetics of aspiration." It is the drive to create urban spaces based on global tastes rather than accommodating the interests of local residents. CPI is not just an economic project, but also a symbolic production aimed at presenting Makassar as a cosmopolitan city. However, as in other postcolonial cities in Southeast Asia (King, 1990; Yeoh, 2003), this global aesthetic is often exclusive and reinforces new forms of social stratification. The most concrete example is the shift in patterns of public space ownership. The CPI area and Losari Beach Pier are now regulated by security

systems, parking fees, and a focus on visitor services. Longtime coastal residents, such as the fishing community of Panambungan—who once used the beach as their living space—have now become 'spectators' of a modernity from which they do not benefit (Interview, 2023). Several efforts have been made to fight for their rights, including submitting petitions to the government and members of the legislative council, as well as through demonstrations. In various megaproject studies in Southeast Asia, this shows that large-scale projects often become enclaves of the global economy while simultaneously serving as sources of local inequality (Shatkin, 2022).



Figure 5. Losari Beach Reclamation. Aerial photo of the Losari Beach reclamation zone (top); Demonstration against the reclamation project (bottom)

(Source: <https://inart.web.id/2009/07/anjungan-pantai-losari-dan-cpi-apakah-obsesi-pejabat-semata/> <https://lbhmakassar.org/liputan-kegiatan/aksi-somasi-tolak-pembangunan-centre-point-of-indonesia>)

Within the framework of postcolonial urban studies (Chakrabarty, 2000; Kusno, 2013), this situation relates to the reproduction of colonial patterns. The city is divided between orderly modern centers and traditional peripheries deemed unproductive. Thus, Makassar's modernity represents a recurring power dynamic: a form of development that always comes from above and ignores voices from below.

At the same time, the narrative of Makassar as a World City is continually promoted through the Makassar Sombere and Smart City program. This slogan rhetorically combines the local value of 'sombere' (hospitality and kinship) with modern, digital notions of a smart city. The main goal of this program is to make the city a center for innovation, technology, and community creativity.

Research Najib (2017) shows that practices on the ground fall far short of the ideal. Digitalization of government (e-government) has improved, but it has yet to be fully inclusive. Access remains limited for residents of densely populated areas, such as those close to zones of modernization like Mariso and Ujung Pandang, as well as dense neighborhoods in other parts of the city like Rappocini and Biringkanaya. Meanwhile, smart infrastructure projects such as CCTV, command centers, and digital signboards only serve to reinforce the image of the city as a place that is monitored and controlled.

On the other hand, the Makassar Eight International Festival and Forum (F8), which began in 2016, strengthens the city's cosmopolitan image. This event showcases eight creative sectors (film, fashion, flora and fauna, food, fusion music, fine arts, fiction writers, and traditional arts) and is supported by global sponsors and the Ministry of Tourism. According to the F8 Activity Report (2019), the festival was attended by over 1 million people and described as 'the manifestation of a creative and inclusive city oriented toward the world'. However, field observations indicate that most local creative actors, especially independent art communities in the Makassar Art Movement, find the event overly focused on exhibition and the

commercialization of local culture. From the perspective of Skvirskaja and Humphrey (2012), This phenomenon represents a form of performative cosmopolitanism – cosmopolitanism performed for political and economic interests, rather than as the result of equal social interaction. In other words, Makassar presents cosmopolitanism as a spectacle, not as an inclusive social practice.

The concept of performative cosmopolitanism and the phenomenon of "spectacular urbanism" that emerge in Southeast Asian cities – including Makassar, Jakarta, and Manila – show similar patterns in attempts to display a global openness through international events, monumental public spaces, and megastructure development projects. In this context, Makassar – through the development of the CPI area and the F8 Festival – presents cosmopolitanism as a spectacle projecting the city as a global space. However, as observed in this study, the social practices behind this image often exhibit disparities in the distribution of the benefits of modernity and access to open urban spaces.

Douglass (2010) in his study, he highlights how postcolonial cities in Southeast Asia adopt various strategies, such as international festivals and creative events, to increase their global visibility, in line with the concept of "spectacular urbanism" that emphasizes the development of monumental public spaces as the stage for a global city performance. However, Roy & Ong (2011) remind us that the process of "worlding" through global urbanization not only brings openness but also creates significant social fragmentation and spatial exclusion. In Jakarta, for example, the development of superblocks and gated communities forms cosmopolitan enclaves separated from the social lives of the city's majority, marking sharp spatial separation and exclusion (Herlambang et al., 2019; Wu & Keil, 2020).

Meanwhile, in Manila, coastal reclamation projects have created modern urban landscapes that also fail to take into account traditional coastal communities, eroding social ties and local communities'

sustainability in their urban spaces (Muhamad Nor et al., 2021). A similar pattern is again evident in Makassar, where projects such as CPI and F8 stand out as performances of cosmopolitanism, but the benefits offered by these global spaces are more limited to elites and certain cultural actors, leaving social inequalities and restricted access for other groups in the urban community.

Thus, Makassar reinforces the argument that cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asian cities is often asymmetrical. Cosmopolitanism functions more as an image and a spectacle—a world-city branding that provides global spaces for certain groups, while producing fragmentation and exclusion for other groups with less access to spaces of modernity. This condition is similar to phenomena already documented in Jakarta and Manila, reflecting a general trend in urbanization and development marked by the contradiction between symbolic global openness and practical social injustice (Herlambang et al., 2019; Muhamad Nor et al., 2021; Wu & Keil, 2020).

On the other hand, as the current of modernization grows stronger, forms of cultural resistance and social negotiation have emerged from urban communities. Historical, artistic, and environmental communities such as Rumata' Artspace Cultural House, Makassar Historia Community, Fort Rotterdam Lovers' Forum, Lingkar Institute, and the Makassar Heritage Society play a unique role in reviving awareness of the city's history.

The activities of these various communities—such as history discussions, old town tours, and local film festivals—represent new forms of urban citizenship, where residents negotiate their rights to memory and space (Božilović, 2018). One concrete example is the movement to save the Fort Rotterdam area and Old Malay Village (Ujung Pandang) from the pressures of property development expansion (2015–2022). Through collaborations with the Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation and local communities, this campaign managed to slow down plans for

commercializing these areas. Similar movements have also been seen in Bantimala and Kalukubodoa, where groups of local youth revive Makassar's old narratives through mural art and digital archive exhibitions (Interview, 2023). Although creative communities strive to reclaim urban spaces through cultural festivals and local historical revitalization, these efforts are often temporary and dependent on fluctuating policy support. Reliance on specific and limited events (festivals, sports, cultural celebrations) makes this resistance difficult to transform into lasting structures (Evans, 2009).

In the context of modern urban theory, this phenomenon shows that modernity is not a linear process towards globality, but rather a pluralistic space for negotiating cosmopolitanism (Levin et al., 2010; Roy & Ong, 2011). City residents are not merely objects of modernization, but actors who interpret and challenge the meaning of modernity itself. Makassar—with its long history as a cosmopolitan port city from the Gowa-Tallo era through the Dutch colonial period—actually has a tradition of openness that differs from the bureaucratically constructed version of cosmopolitanism. As stated by Poelinggomang (2016), Makassar's multi-ethnic character and maritime connectivity have shaped its “organic cosmopolitanism”—different from the artificial cosmopolitanism now managed by the state and the market.

By the mid-2020s, the ambiguity of Makassar's modernity becomes increasingly evident in the measurement of social inequality using the Gini Index (Gini Ratio), a statistical indicator used to measure the level of inequality in income or expenditure distribution within a population. The Gini Index value ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates perfect equality while 1 indicates perfect inequality (one individual controls all income). Values below 0.3 are categorized as low inequality, 0.3–0.5 as moderate inequality, and above 0.5 as high inequality. Thus, changes in the Gini Index over time provide important insight into whether a region's economic growth is also

accompanied by a more equitable distribution of prosperity.

Table 1. Economic Growth and Gini Ratio of Makassar, 2014-2025

Tahun	Economic Growth	Gini Ratio
2014	7,39	0,380
2015	7,55	0,395
2016	8,03	0,397
2017	8,20	0,396
2018	8,42	0,383
2019	8,79	0,390
2020	-1,27	0,400
2021	4,47	0,400
2022	5,40	0,395
2023	5,31	0,387
2024	5,56	0,372
2025	5,34	0,391

(Source: Central Statistics Agency of South Sulawesi Province, *Gini Ratio by Regency/City in South Sulawesi; Growth Rate of Regional Gross Domestic Product at 2010 Constant Prices by Regency/City in South Sulawesi Province*, accessed 9 December 2025, <https://sulsel.bps.go.id>)

In the Gini Ratio table above, it is clearly stated that although the economic growth rate in Makassar City remains stable and tends to increase over time—and is among the best in Indonesia—it does not directly correlate with equitable distribution of welfare among the city's residents. The level of inequality continues to rise within the moderate range, including during the years when the peak of modern urban development was underway. Data from the Makassar City Central Statistics Agency (BPS) from 2014 to 2025 shows that economic growth has remained stable at above 5%, except during the Covid-19 period in 2020–2021; in fact, from 2014–2019, growth exceeded 7%. However, the Gini Ratio has shown no improvement and remains at a moderate level of inequality, from 0.380 in 2014 to 0.391 in 2025. Although there was significant economic growth during this period, inequality did not show a consistent decline. In some years, increased economic growth even coincided with a rise in the Gini Index. From a simple (descriptive) correlational perspective, this pattern suggests that the relationship between economic growth and inequality in Makassar is weak and non-linear. In other words, economic expansion driven by modernization projects and urban

investment does not automatically yield equitable welfare distribution. These findings reinforce the argument that urban modernity in Makassar's context reflects more spatial and symbolic growth rather than substantive social redistribution. This is visibly evident in the field. The areas of Pantai Losari, CPI, and Tanjung Bunga have developed rapidly—they are well planned and modern—whereas, right beside them, areas like Mariso and Ujung Pandang remain densely populated and underdeveloped. Meanwhile, in other parts of the city, regions like Panakkukang and Tamalate are booming with modern properties, while areas such as Manggala and Biringkanaya still face issues of poverty, unemployment, flooding, population density, and limited access to public services. This pattern is consistent with trends in cities that employ 'urban entrepreneurialism' strategies, where growth tends to be sectorally and spatially concentrated, meaning economic benefits are not distributed evenly (Harvey, 1989a; Peck et al., 2013).

Modernity in Makassar City appears as a fragmented project. The image of a modern and cosmopolitan city strongly emerges in slogans, festivals, and digital visualizations, but does not always align

with the social realities on the ground. In [Kusno \(2013\)](#) terminology, this is 'ambiguous modernity' – a modernity that is continuously constructed yet never completed, as it is unable to unite the past, present, and future in a singular, inclusive narrative.

Comparatively, Makassar demonstrates that ambiguous modernity is not an exception but a recurring pattern among postcolonial cities in Southeast Asia. While cities like Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Manila reveal tensions between global branding and social inequality, Makassar is also undergoing these dynamics. This is a situation where global aspirations are produced through symbolic projects but still tethered by historical social structures that have not been fully transformed. In the context of postcolonial urban theory ([Bunnell & Goh, 2012](#); [Roy & Ong, 2011](#)), Makassar shows how cities outside the core national economy continue to participate in the circulation of global ideas, but do so through more fragile and ambivalent negotiations. Compared to Surabaya and Penang, Makassar exhibits a similar pattern in its use of waterfront areas as symbols of globalization. However, unlike Surabaya, which is relatively more established industrially, Makassar relies on cosmopolitan symbolism as a strategy for regional differentiation. Like Penang, Makassar faces tensions between historical heritage and the commodification of coastal space ([Douglass, 2010](#)).

CONCLUSION

The modernity of Makassar City in the early 21st century reflects a complex historical process—an extended journey from a colonial port city to a cosmopolitan city striving to position itself within global networks. Over the past three decades, efforts by the city government, the private sector, and the community have fueled various innovations and transformations in urban spaces. These range from the revitalization of Losari Beach and the development of the Center Point of Indonesia (CPI) to the organization of the F8

Festival— all intended to build Makassar's image as a World City.

However, the modernity being pursued has not been fully realized and is not free from contradictions. Behind the monumental projects and the narratives of a "world city" and "smart city," lie layers of issues: spatial inequality, social marginalization, and ecological crises. The city has developed visually and symbolically, yet remains fragile in terms of its social structure and environmental sustainability. Modernity in Makassar is not just about constructing buildings and roads, but also about building desire—a desire to be 'part of the world'—which often is not accompanied by profound social transformation.

Conceptually, this research shows that the ambiguity of Makassar is a product of what [Kusno \(2013\)](#) is called the aesthetics of urban modernity, where modernity is manifested more as visualization and discourse rather than as social practice. In [Harvey's \(1989\)](#) the framework, Makassar is experiencing a phase of urban entrepreneurialism, where the government and private sector collaborate to shape the city as an 'economic product' to be marketed to investors and tourists. On the other hand, from the perspectives of [Chakrabarty \(2000\)](#) [Appadurai \(1996\)](#) Makassar's ambiguity represents a form of postcolonial modernity—one that adopts global forms without fully negotiating with its local context.

Ultimately, the modernity of this city can be understood not as a result, but as a process continuously negotiated among the government, private sector, and society. Historically, this process is a continuation of dynamics that have existed since the colonial era: asymmetric relations between the center and the periphery, between projects of modernity and uneven social realities. Thus, this study highlights that the history of Makassar in the 21st century is not only about the city's physical progress, but also about achieving meaning: how the city negotiates its identity among tradition, modernity, and globality.

In the end, Makassar represents the face of major Indonesian cities today—especially in the eastern region—living in tension between the desire to become modern and the reality of social and ecological limitations. It is a city that aspires to be cosmopolitan, while simultaneously seeking balance between local values and global demands. Therefore, understanding Makassar’s history in the early 21st century is not merely about reading a series of urban developments, but also about interpreting the narratives of people, spaces, and ideas of modernity that move continuously between idealism and reality. Through the combination of these three elements, Makassar emerges—not as a city that has failed to become modern—but as a city that continuously negotiates the meaning of modernity amid historical tensions, power, and social identity.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the debate on postcolonial urbanism by demonstrating that urban modernity is not merely the adoption of global models, but a layered process of historical negotiation. This study further enriches the literature on Southeast Asian cities by positioning Makassar as an important example of a “secondary city” actively producing its own global narrative. In terms of policy, this study emphasizes the importance of a more inclusive approach to urban development, particularly in reclamation and coastal revitalization projects. The city government must ensure that the production of public space functions not only as a symbol of globalization, but also guarantees equal social access. The limited research period and its primary emphasis on discursive and representational dimensions allow future research to expand quantitative analyses related to economic impact and demographic changes. Follow-up studies may also develop comparative studies between Makassar and other port cities in Southeast Asia, such as Surabaya, Penang, or Cebu, to deepen the understanding of cosmopolitan dynamics in the region.

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