

## **FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE: THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE AND ARTISTS' EXPRESSION IN MAKASSAR CITY**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the changes occurring in the art space in Makassar City, with a particular emphasis on the shift in focus from public to private space as a means of self-preservation and a form of resistance by the artist community. This study uses a qualitative approach and the framework of Henri Lefebvre's theory of spatial production. It shows that several spaces, such as the Societeit de Harmoni, Fort Rotterdam, and Losari Beach area, are now commodified and controlled by the bureaucracy. These spaces were once collective and emotional living spaces for the art community. As a result of this transformation, their functions have changed into formal institutions, tourist attractions, and consumption centers. This evolution has led to a crisis of representation and the alienation of the art community from these spaces. Artists have created alternative spaces of representation in their homes, private studios, and small communities in response to these conditions. These spaces still play a strategic role in fostering knowledge production, social solidarity, and free cultural expression, despite limited public access. The results demonstrate that artists' spatial production is not simply an artistic event; it is a political struggle to maintain the right to cultural and urban space. This study emphasizes the importance of creating more open and participatory city policies, especially to maintain a community-based local arts ecosystem.*

**Keywords:** *Public space, Private space, Production of space, Makassar artists, Lefebvre*

### **A. Introduction**

Space is not a neutral or static entity. Rather, it is a social construct that is constantly changing due to political, economic, and everyday practices. In *The Production of Space* (1991) Henri Lefebvre argued that space is a social product shaped by power relations, material practices, and symbolic representations. He proposed the concept of space in three dimensions: conceived space (space conceptually designed by planners or technocrats), perceived space (space used in everyday life) and lived space (space experienced affectively and symbolically by social individuals). These three dimensions do not always coexist. Instead, they often become sites of conflict between planning authorities and the community of space users.

In the context of the transformation of Makassar City's arts space, this phenomenon is evident. Places that once allowed people to interact with art and culture, such as the Societeit de Harmoni Building and Fort Rotterdam, are now being privatized and commodified. Although this transformation is often framed as a discourse of revitalization or preservation, the process essentially demonstrates market logic and state intervention in the formation of abstract spaces, specifically spaces created technocratically and detached from the emotional connections and lives of the arts community. Therefore, arts spaces in Makassar exhibit signs of a shift from a participatory social environment to one dominated by structural interests.

On the other views, the creative city theory popularized by Richard Florida (2002) proposes a paradigm of a creative class comprised of artists, architects, academics, designers, and technology workers as key actors in urban economic growth. City governments are encouraged to cultivate a progressive and "creative" image through cultural festivals, galleries, and public spaces oriented toward cultural capital. However, as criticized in numerous studies, including by Adam Nadolny (2015), this model is often applied top-down, without understanding the socio-spatial basis of local creative communities.

In this regard, Lefebvre makes an important and relevant reflective contribution. Nadolny (2015) notes that Lefebvre not only criticized the loss of "historical continuity" of urban space due to industrialization and commodification but also emphasized the importance of the materiality of space as a medium for social and aesthetic interaction. Lefebvre's concept of "surplus of art" suggests that healthy urban spaces should possess aesthetic, symbolic, and affective advantages, not merely functional or economic ones. This is where the tension with Florida's vision arises, which tends to reduce creativity to economic capital.

Lefebvre defines the creative class as a crucial component of urban citizens, especially citizens who possess the political and cultural capacity to claim, interpret, and intervene in urban space. In this context, Nadolny's reinforces this idea by demonstrating that artists not only act as cultural actors but also as political subjects with a right to the city and the right to participate in the process of creating space and making decisions about urban planning. However, in a pragmatic environment such as that seen in Makassar, the grassroots artist community is isolated from the environment they inhabit and historically define. Responding to this condition, the arts community in Makassar initiated the formation of alternative spaces outside formal institutional structures, such as private homes, collective studios, and coffee shops, which function as places for practice, discussion, and exhibition of works. These spaces can be understood as manifestations of lived space, namely space that is interpreted and lived affectively by the community, as well as a form of resistance to the dominance of conceived space produced by planning authorities. In practice, arts communities not only shape physical places but also produce meaning, strengthen collective identity, and reconstruct affective relationships with urban space.

To address this situation, Makassar arts community began establishing alternative locations unconnected to formal institutions, such as private homes, collective studios, and coffee shops. These locations serve as venues for practicing, speaking, and displaying their work. These spaces can be considered representations of lived space, that is, spaces that are meaningful and lived by the community. They can also be seen as a way to challenge the dominance of perceived space created by planning authorities. The arts community, in fact, not only creates place but also creates meaning, strengthens collective identity, and reconstructs emotional relationships with urban space.

This research uses a qualitative approach to investigate how artists use art spaces in Makassar to produce, reclaim, and negotiate them. All of this is done within the context of a changing city increasingly controlled by market interests and state bureaucracy. The primary focus of this research is to understand how the arts community employs specific strategies to maintain its existence and support a more equitable, inclusive, and participatory cultural space.

## **B. Research Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study to examine in depth the transformation of art spaces and artists' survival strategies in Makassar City. The research focuses on three main locations with significant historical and cultural value, specifically the Societeit de Harmoni Building (South Sulawesi Arts Building), Fort Rotterdam, and Losari Beach, as well as on the phenomenon of the migration of art activities to private spaces. This research uses data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews with several Makassar artists. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore their spatial experiences, survival strategies, and perceptions of changes in the function of space, as well as literature and document studies.

## **C. Discussion**

### **1. *Societeit de Harmoni* as an Arts Space**

From its inception, the building was designed and intended as an arts space primarily accessible and enjoyed by the bourgeoisie or upper-middle class. This reflects the pattern of exclusivity in the use of urban cultural spaces. Access to arts and performance facilities has historically tended to favor certain social groups with economic and cultural capital, while other groups often found themselves passive spectators or even marginalized from the dynamics of artistic production taking place within it.

Yusdistira Sukata, in his novel "Noni Societeit de Harmoni," describes the artistic activities within the building, which, by its very nature, constituted an arts space. These activities began with the arrival of the building's managing director, Margareth Van Gijn, a young, charismatic woman with a reputation for artistic prowess. The Managing Director, nicknamed Noni, arrived in July 1916 and was personally met by Governor Th.A.L. Heyting at Makassar Harbor.

Margareth Van Gijn would organize the arts activities, which were essentially bourgeois parties at the time. In its function, the Societeit de Harmoni was built for the entertainment of the Dutch colonial elite of the time. The building was used for dance parties, music concerts, dinner parties, billiards and card games, and other social gatherings. These events reflected the Western lifestyle and culture that the European colonial community in Batavia sought to preserve.

This building was accessible only to the European elite and was not open to the indigenous population. The Societeit de Harmoni became a symbol of the colonial government's cultural and social power over urban space. It emphasized social segregation and the identity of the European upper class in the colony. In addition to entertainment activities, the building was also used for classical music concerts, meetings of literary and scientific societies (such as the Bataviaasch Genootschap), and book auctions. This also made it a cultural and intellectual space.

There are at least four Societeit de Harmoni buildings built by the Dutch in Indonesia. Among them, the Societeit de Harmoni in Jakarta, known as Gedung Harmoni, was built in 1810 and inaugurated in 1815. This building became the center of European socialite life in Batavia and was the oldest social club in Asia at the time. Unfortunately, this building was demolished in 1985 to make way for the expansion of the road and parking area of the State Secretariat Office. There is also another building in Semarang, which was later sold and converted into a new function. The Societeit de Harmoni Building was also built in Pasuruan in 1858. This building still stands, along with the Societeit de Harmoni building in Makassar, built in 1896.

Like Societeit de Harmoni in other regions, this building served as a gathering place for European elites and native aristocrats to socialize and hold official events. After Indonesian independence, the building was converted into the South Sulawesi Arts Building, which remains in use today. It is one of the oldest art spaces in Makassar, with its history dating back to the late 19th century.

The building's architecture adopts the Renaissance or Neo-Griekse Stijl style, reflecting the strong influence of European culture during the colonial period. It stood in the Stad Vlaardingen area, now Jalan Ahmad Yani. In 1910, when Makassar acquired Gemeente status, the building was renovated and enlarged, losing its original character as it adapted to the needs of Makassar at the time.



*Picture 1: Societeit de Harmoni between 1890 and 1900 which is still in its old form  
(Tropenmuseum, part of the National Museum of World Cultures from [sulsel.idntimes.com](http://sulsel.idntimes.com))*

Societeit de Harmoni particularly the one in Makassar using Henri Lefebvre's theory of spatial production, as a form of conceived space, designed and controlled by colonial powers to fulfill specific social and political agendas.

Henri Lefebvre emphasized that space is not a neutral entity; rather, it is a social construct shaped and transformed by power relations. The Societeit de Harmoni building in Makassar historically served not only as a venue for artistic performances but also as a tool of colonial ideology. The colonial government constructed similar buildings in various cities. This practice demonstrated a systematic effort to project an image of colonial superiority through architecture and urban planning. They restricted access to meetings, gatherings, and artistic performances, reinforcing the social hierarchy between the rulers and the local population.

The Societeit de Harmoni also served as a symbolic representation of colonial power in the urban environment. This space focused on the ideological goals of colonialism, such as establishing strong social boundaries, maintaining structural distance between colonizers and



colonized, and internalizing Western values through modern cultural mechanisms such as celebrations, art, and lifestyle. This cultural dominance was reinforced through the control of artistic practices that could be performed in the space, as demonstrated by Margareth Van Gijk, who designated certain types of art, such as the Stamboel Orchestra, Langgam Hawaii, and the Makassarese Toneel Vereniging performance, as legitimate representations of the performing arts. Furthermore, the fact that Dutch was used as the language of communication in the region demonstrates the language's role in maintaining exclusivity and representing colonial power.

However, Society of Harmoni underwent a series of changes in function and form, reflecting the dynamics of power relations. During the Japanese occupation, the building served as a community meeting hall. Subsequently, between 1960 and 1978, it served as the office of the South Sulawesi Regional People's Representative Council. This transformation marked the space's shift from a cultural symbol to an instrument of state bureaucracy, with its original symbolic and architectural significance beginning to diminish.



*Picture2; Societeit de Harmoni from 1960 to 1978, this room was used as the DPRD office of South Sulawesi Level I*  
(<https://simcabud.makassarkota.go.id/parasanganta/tentang-bangunan/societeit-de-harmonie>)

The building served as the secretariat of the Indonesian National Youth Committee from 1978 to 1980. Afterward, it was given to the Makassar Arts Council with the approval of the Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia, Adam Malik. The building's proscenium stage was then used by the DKM, converting it into a cinema when there were no scheduled performances.

Hasimi Ibrahim as an arts and culture activist, said that in the 1980s, the building formerly known as the Societeit de Harmonie, was converted into an arts venue by the DKM. The main stage was again used for various types of arts. However, in 1989 the artists' community

operating in the building had to cease its activities due to eviction by the local government, in connection with plans to convert the building into government offices.

In an interview conducted on April 17, 2025, Hasymi described the building as a "home" for artists across generations:

*The Arts Building was very lively at the time. I was still in high school and had seen many performances. There were theater, music and poetry performances. That introduced us to the world of art, not just the stage but also the discussions in the A.M. Miala room or studio. (Interview, Hasymi Ibrahim)*

In his experience, Hasymi described the organically growing arts ecosystem within the building. Informal spaces such as weekly discussions, group rehearsals and performance waiting rooms became an irreplaceable part of the spatial experience. This aligns with Henri Lefebvre's concept of lived space, a space that is not only used but also symbolically and emotionally meaningful to its users.

However, this situation changed drastically in 1989 when the local government took over the building to use it as a bureaucratic office. Hasymi stated:

*In 1989, the artists were evicted. Suddenly, we were told that the building would become the governor's assistant office or the Regional Development Planning Agency. We all moved to Fort Rotterdam. That was a turning point. From then on, the arts space began to disintegrate. (Interview, Hasymi Ibrahim)*

This eviction marked the re-dominance of conceived space over lived space. Spaces previously occupied and given meaning by the artist community were returned to the framework of state bureaucratic management. This process reflects how the state maintains control over urban space, including cultural spaces, and emphasizes that arts spaces are never fully autonomous from power.

Furthermore, Hasymi explained that even after 1989, artists still faced administrative obstacles to holding performances in arts venues:

*We have to get permission from the police to perform, not just the management. Sometimes we're also asked what the content is and who's coming. So there's still control. (Interview, Hasymi Ibrahim)*

This practice illustrates the symbolic and procedural control of artistic expression. In Lefebvre's view, this production of space demonstrates how space is not simply a physical location, but a tool of ideological and administrative domination, where the state maintains boundaries between what can and cannot occur within a given space.

This demonstrates that artists' experiences of space are inextricably linked to the structural conflict between artistic expression and bureaucratic authority. The Societeit de Harmoni, in the experience of Hasymi Ibrahim and his generation, was more than just a performance hall; it was a meaningful, living space, yet also vulnerable to seizure and erasure by larger powers.

Political reforms opened new opportunities; in the early 2000s, artists, along with the South Sulawesi Arts Council, reclaimed this space and revitalized it as a performance center. However, administrative control remained in the hands of the local government, creating tension between institutional logic and the needs of the arts community.

Within Lefebvre's framework, this transformation demonstrates that space is never final or stable. Space is constantly undergoing dialectical reproduction, occurring through conflicts between various actors with differing interests. Lefebvre explains that space is produced in three dialectical realms: conceived space (space designed from above by authorities), perceived space (space practiced functionally), and lived space (space given symbolic and emotional meaning by its users). In the context of the Societeit de Harmonie, these three realms are present and intersect.

On the one hand, this space retains its conceived nature, as its management is dominated by state institutions that formulate the use and function of space from a top-down perspective. On the other hand, this space also becomes lived space when the artist community fills it with meanings, memories, and artistic practices that resist power. In this context, art spaces become arenas of contestation between state power and citizens' cultural expression.

Over time, A. Yulia Astuti's (2024) thesis entitled "Evaluation of the Utilization of the Cultural Heritage Building of the Societeit de Harmoni Arts Building in Makassar City" discovered that one of the rooms in the Arts Building is currently being used as a coffee shop. The room is the A.M. Miala Theater room, which Hasymi Ibrahim calls a discussion and practice room for artists.

*Currently, the ongoing use of the Societeit de Harmoni Arts Building is that this building is used as the Mandala Museum & Societeit de Harmoni UPT Office and one of the rooms in the building is used as a coffee shop."*

This phenomenon reflects the commodification of art spaces, where the logic of the market and consumption replaces the logic of community and cultural expression. Referring to Lefebvre's theory, this is a form of representational space usurped by the logic of capital. This spatial transformation can also be read as a manifestation of the state's failure to protect the social and cultural functions of art spaces, tending to encourage their use for economic value. As a result, artists lose their articulate space and are forced to create new spaces outside the official system.

Lefebvre emphasizes that modern forms of repression do not always manifest themselves in outright prohibitions, but often operate subtly through design and regulation. In this context, the state no longer explicitly prohibits artistic activities but reorganizes access and the function of spaces through administrative policies and licensing procedures. The transformation of the Societet de Harmonie into a UPT office and coffee shop, without substantive involvement of the arts community, is an example of what Lefebvre calls a strategy of controlling space through hegemonic representation.

This situation removes artists from the spaces they once created and enlivened. Artists lose their lived space and are forced to create new ones, both in temporary public spaces and in private spaces they independently construct. This process illustrates how art spaces, instead of preserving their socio-cultural function, are instead directed to serve the economic and aesthetic logic of consumerism.

Thus, Lefebvre's perspective suggests that the use of the Societeit de Harmoni Building as a coffee shop is not simply a change in its physical function, but rather a change in the structure of power over space. It is part of the capitalist process of spatial production

that shifts artists' positions from the center to the periphery, from providers to spectators in the spaces they once constructed.

In an interview with Shinta Febriani, the artist expressed her concern over the changing function and meaning of the Societeit de Harmoni Building. The space, once a center for art production and performance, has now shifted its meaning to become a place for consumption and entertainment, particularly since part of its space has been used as a coffee shop. He stated that the representation of artists in the space had disappeared, replaced by young people who used the building as a place to hang out and for informal consumption.

*If we look at it now, it's no longer artists who represent art buildings. But many groups there, young people who often hang out every night, enjoying yellow rice and that representation of artists is lost... For example, spatially, there's a room there that used as a rehearsal space, you could call it a theater rehearsal space. But now it's a coffee shop, so the representation is different. Now the space is commercial."(Interview Shinta Febriani)*

Referring to Henri Lefebvre's theory, this change reflects a shift from representational space, a space lived and interpreted by artists, to representations of space, a space engineered by institutional logic and capitalism. When art spaces are transformed into objects of commercial consumption, they cease to be a field for cultural expression and production, but instead become a tool for the reproduction of power and the market.

Shinta explicitly stated that the current logic of managing art spaces is directed at meeting Regional Original Income targets. The state, in this case the local government, intervenes in the space through utilization policies imbued with economic motives. As a result, artists lose access to the space, both administratively and culturally. According to Shinta, the Societeit de Harmoni Building is now more a representation of state power than a space for cultural participation.



Picture 3; One of the rooms in Societeit de Harmoni which has become a cafe for Regional Original Income purposes  
(Source; instagram)

One of the spaces in Societeit de, this condition shows that space is not only produced by physical materiality, but also by ideology. The conversion of an art space into a Coffee Shop is a process where the social and historical values of space are replaced by economic exchange value. Artists who were previously subjects in the production of space are now reduced to objects who



no longer have control over the meaning of the space. Harmoni which became a Café for the benefit of Regional Original Income.

*In the case of the Arts Building, there is interference from the government's capitalist mindset, for example, how can an arts building have Regional Original Income so that it is then regulated in such a way. The impact, the effect is that artists no longer have the access they used to, no longer have access to create there. So the Arts Building is no longer a representation of the production of works of art, it is actually, a representation of power in this case is the government."(Interview Shinta Febriani)*

In addition to changes in physical function, the changes to the Societeit de Harmonie building demonstrate a shift in power within the space through mechanisms of symbolic representation and administrative regulations, such as permits. In this situation, the arts community was excluded from the space through subtle and systematic strategies, reflecting the practice of spatial hegemony in urban governance.

Societeit de Harmonie must also be understood as a representation of cultural conflict within the spatial structure of the postcolonial city, not simply as a historical monument left behind by colonialism. This space has been consistently remade by various parties for various interests. Therefore, it remains open to negotiations of meaning, contestations of discourse, and contestations of interests.

## **2. Landscape of Arts Spaces in Makassar City**

In an interview, Hasymi Ibrahim stated that the Arts Building, Fort Rotterdam and Losari Beach are three important points in Makassar's arts landscape that were once centers of creative, social and political activity for artists. However, these spaces have now been re-presented by state and market forces, leaving behind disconnection, alienation and survival strategies.

In addition to Hasymi Ibrahim, Bahar Merdhu, the manager of Societeit de Harmoni also spoke. In an interview at a café on Toddopuli street, Bahar explained that managing the Societeit de Harmoni building is not simply a matter of facility administration, but also concerns artists' fundamental rights to a space for expression. The artist, who has been working since 1985, revealed the dynamics of managing the Societeit de Harmoni building as a cultural space that once served as a center of the city's arts activities.

Bahar explained that during the early days of the reformation, artists fought to "reclaim" an arts building that had previously been converted into a government office. This struggle was not only physical but also symbolic, restoring the building's function as an inclusive public space for artists of various disciplines. He managed the building for 17 years, under a semi-presidium collective management system, along with several other artists, including Bahar Merdhu, Asia Ramli Prapanca and Arman Dewarti.

During that period, the Arts Building became a vibrant space filled with rehearsals, performances, discussions and even a meeting place across various artistic disciplines. The usage fee was kept very affordable, as the management was carried out in a spirit of mutual cooperation among the artists.

*Because at that time, the important thing was that you had a little money, you could pay us, we could use it to pay for electricity, maintenance and so on."(Interview Bahar Merdhu)*

The building functioned not only as a performance venue, but also as a space for rehearsals, discussions and even a gathering point for various arts:

*Sometimes the space was used not just for performances, but also for processes, rehearsals the process of gathering, meeting there. (Interview Bahar Merdhu)*

However, when the building was taken over by the government and turned into a Regional Technical Implementation Unit under the Tourism Office, its orientation shifted to a commercial institution. The building was now required to contribute revenue to the regional treasury. As a result, rental costs soared without being matched by improvements to basic facilities such as lighting, air conditioning, and sound systems. The building, once a symbol of collectivity and inclusion, became a structural burden for local artists who could not afford the rent. The space, which should have been "common property," lost its essence as a space for artistic representation.

*But when the government took it over, it was difficult, because they had burdens, bureaucracy... it was managed by the Technical Implementation Unit, it paid the government... so it became very commercial. (Interview Bahar Merdhu)*

This situation created alienation for local artists. What was once an inclusive space became a burden:

*Artists also have to pay, prepare for all kinds of things... when they get there, there are no facilities. No equipment, no air conditioning, no sound, no traps. (Interview Bahar Merdhu)*

Since being taken over by the South Sulawesi Provincial Government, the Head of the Makassar City Culture, Sittiara Kinang, has expressed her desire for the Makassar City Government to take over management of the Makassar Arts Building. The building, located on Ahmad Yani street, was formerly known as the Societeit de Harmoni and was built by the Dutch colonial government in 1896. Sittiara believes that management by the Makassar City Government would bring the facility closer to local artists and enhance its use as a city arts center. She plans to submit a formal request to the Mayor of Makassar to hand over the building to the city government for more optimal management.

The lack of connectivity between the department holding the arts budget and the building's management creates an imbalanced ecosystem. The department often holds ceremonial events without involving the grassroots arts community. Meanwhile, the arts building is left to generate its own revenue without adequate subsidies. This has pushed artists to withdraw from public spaces and turn to private spaces, such as home studios and small community spaces.

The transformation of arts building management demonstrates that physical space does not automatically become social space if management orientation neglects participatory values and partisanship. In the context of Henri Lefebvre's production of space, this experience demonstrates how arts spaces can transform from spaces of social representation into spaces of bureaucratic domination, when the logic of capital and institutional control takes over social functions.

Shinta Febriany highlighted the deepest impact of this change as a crisis of representation: "The building is no longer a representation of artistic production, but a representation of power. The government treats the building as a source of regional revenue" she said.

The disconnected budget policy between the funding agency and the building management exacerbates the situation. Artists receive no subsidies, while the building is expected to be self-sufficient. "The agency with the arts budget is busy with its own activities... creating art according to its own taste... the money is spent there, while the arts building is looking for money," concluded Bahar Merdhu.

These changes not only impact artistic activities but also touch the emotional aspects and identity of the community. Artists feel they have lost space to grow and a sense of belonging. Asia Ramli Prapanca, an artist, also expressed concern that there are no longer any art events around the building. "Now there are no more art events around the building. Before, someone would suddenly read poetry, but now it's empty."

This situation has led artists to move away from public spaces and create private studios. Art spaces that were once social have now become exclusive and torn apart by structural interests. Hasymi Ibrahim described artists' shift to private spaces as a survival strategy: "They marginalize themselves and enter private spaces... their private homes become meeting places."

Shinta calls this a "survival space," a space that still opens up possibilities for expression but is very limited: "In the words of other artists, the form of spatial production to survive must be in private spaces... because urban spaces have become too capitalized."

For artists, besides the Societeit de Harmony the artists' building like Fort Rotterdam is also a space inhabited by artists and connected to the Societeit de Harmony, a space that sustains the arts ecosystem. Hasymi calls Fort Rotterdam a "thinking house," a place where artists can discuss, learn across disciplines, and work together.

This building is a colonial heritage site that has been used by various arts communities since the 1980s as a venue for rehearsals, discussions, and performances. Shinta Febriany, Hasmy Ibrahim and Bahar Merdhu recall their first involvement in theater training by Sanggar Merah Putih at Fort Rotterdam. Activities at the fort were not only aesthetic, but also political and educational. The open spaces in and around the fort created a collaborative and participatory atmosphere.

However, the fort's function has now shifted to a tourist destination managed by the city government. Access to arts activities is increasingly limited and subject to bureaucratic regulations and high rental rates. In Lefebvre's perspective, this indicates a shift from lived space to abstract space from space experienced collectively to space represented and controlled by commercial logic.

Hasymi recalled, "The fort used to be where we grew up. Now, even entry requires permission." The once vibrant space is now subject to bureaucracy, high rental rates, and tourist attractions that erase its representational dimension. Meanwhile, Asia Ramli Prapanca recalled how studios practiced freely without restrictions.

*Spaces for expression were very open back then. Especially at Fort Rotterdam... art studios always practiced there. It wasn't prohibited. (Interview Asia Ramli Prapanca)*

From the 1980s to the early 2000s, in its courtyard, artists read poetry, performed theater, painted and held discussions late into the night. No permits were needed, no bureaucracy required. Just a desire to express themselves and interact. At that time, Fort Rotterdam facilitated meetings across the arts community. It gave birth to solidarity, ideas and even movements. It became a place for shared learning and celebration of diverse art forms, from contemporary to

traditional. One artist called it a "living public space," a place where anyone could transform the street into a stage.

*In the past, Benteng was an open space. We could read poetry and perform theater without the hassle of permits. Now, it's deserted. There are coffee shops, and music is played on speakers, but there's no longer the arts scene like before. The public space is no longer representative."(Interview Asia Ramli Prapanca)*

However, over time that atmosphere faded. Since the revitalization of Fort Rotterdam, once a symbol of freedom of expression, it has become more frequently filled with commercial events and cultural tourism devoid of the spirit of art.

This phenomenon can be understood through the concept of alienation, as developed by Karl Marx. In a capitalist society, individuals are alienated from their work and from the creative process. Artists experience alienation because they no longer have access to or control over the spaces they once used for their work. The revitalization process, based on market logic, means that artwork and cultural expression are no longer born from collective needs, but rather from the demands of the market and tourism. Cultural spaces are transformed into showcases, no longer places for the development of awareness, resistance, or free expression.

Henri Lefebvre also observed this spatial transformation, arguing that space is a social and ideological construct as well as a material one. In this theoretical context, public spaces like Fort Rotterdam were initially considered living spaces, where the artist community lived, experienced, and understood. However, the function of these spaces changed with the revitalization of the country. It has transformed into a capitalist-oriented space, focused on economic efficiency and aesthetic visualizations suited to the tourism industry.

This shift in orientation has diminished the affective and participatory aspects of space use. They are now positioned as passive spectators or consumers, rather than active subjects in shaping the space's meaning. Thus, a public space that was once open and accessible to art has become standardized and commodified.

Fort Rotterdam still stands as a magnificent architectural icon, but the building no longer represents the dynamics of Makassar's art world. While it remains spatially present, the space has lost its symbolic function as a locus of cultural and artistic activism. All that remains is the collective memory of the art events, social networks, and ideological conflicts that once occurred within it.

*The arts building and the Fort are now just names. The space exists, but we no longer represent it. It used to be a theater practice space, but now it's a coffee shop. The space has been taken over by commercialism,"said Shinta Febriani.*

Besides Benteng Rotterdam, Losari Beach is a similar space, a democratic space that brings together artistic expression and the public. Asia Ramli Prapanca recalls a time when anyone was free to use the streets as a stage:

*"Anyone can turn the street into a stage, suddenly putting on a show."*

Losari Beach plays a crucial role as an open-air stage for street art. Asia Ramli Prapanca recalls a time when reading poetry or performing theater on the beach didn't require official permission. "Anyone could use the street as a stage," he said. For Ramli and his community,



Losari was an inclusive space that not only allowed freedom of expression but also brought artists together with a diverse audience.

However, Losari's shift from a space for expression to a selfie-tourism destination has created alienation for the arts community. Hasymi stated that Losari has now become merely a "nostalgic place" because it has lost its function as a cultural space. In Lefebvre's theory, this demonstrates how spatial representations are reproduced by the state and the market for the sake of economic visualization, rather than social expression.

The loss of these spaces has left many artists feeling uprooted from their community roots. Shinta noted that social spaces like parks, highways and bus stops, which they once engaged in through art, have now been transformed into spaces with other purposes. This is where we see that artistic expression is not only concerned with the medium, but also with space as a site for social practice and resistance.

Ram said that reading poetry in Losari today would feel "uncomfortable" and alienating because the space has been transformed into a visual tourism zone. Selfie spots and aesthetic spatial arrangements have replaced social meaning. "Now, reading poetry there feels uncomfortable," he said.

The transformation of the function of these three spaces demonstrates the dominant pattern in urban spatial policy: commodification and the dominance of administrative power. Shinta stated, "The representation of art is gone... now it's no longer the artist who represents the building, but the coffee shop and the tariff."

In Lefebvre's view, this is a shift from representational space, the space experienced and created by artists, to representations of space, the space determined by those in power and economic regulations.

### **3. The Artist's Sense of Place**

The artists recounted how, after rehearsing at Fort Rotterdam, if there was a performance, they would walk to the Societeit de Harmoni building to watch. Every day without a performance scheduled, they would stroll to Losari Beach. The artists gathered at the Reka cafe, along the shoreline of Losari Beach, which stretches along the coastal landscape. There, artists would compose poetry and sing, and some songs were even composed in that space.

These spatial points are closely related to the Makassar City arts ecosystem. These three points are not only understood as physical places, but also as social, emotional and political spaces that have historically shaped the collective experiences of artists across generations. Sense of place, or the emotional and cultural attachment to the space, is an important dimension of the artists' experience of the space.

Asia Ramli Prapanca explained how this building once served as a place where artists could perform directly without bureaucracy. "Before, we could get out of the car and read poetry. Now, the place feels foreign," she said. This experience demonstrates that artists' sense of place in art buildings is formed from the direct relationship between body, space, and expression.

Shinta Febriany refers to a "sense of place crisis" among artists. She feels a sense of loss, not only due to the change in function of the building, but also due to the loss of social interaction that once defined the space. She said, "We used to discuss, rehearse, and then perform. Now we come only to watch or take care of administration."

Meanwhile, Hasyimi Ibrahim, art buildings, once ideological spaces, places where they absorbed ideas, engaged in intergenerational dialogue, and honed social awareness, as he calls them "thinking houses," have now been transformed into formal institutions alienated from the daily practices of the arts community.

In Lefebvre's framework, this sense of place crisis results from the takeover of representational space by dominant power. When space, previously produced by the community through memory, experience, and affection, is taken over and re-represented as formal space, symbolic alienation occurs. Artists feel like "guests" in their own homes.

This experience demonstrates that art spaces cannot be separated from the social practices that sustain them. A sense of place is not simply established through architectural design or formal function, but through emotional connections that develop from collective interactions. When these interactions are interrupted, the meaning of space changes.

#### **4. Seniman, *Creative Class* and Space Production**

The changing landscape of arts spaces in Makassar City, as outlined in the previous section, not only reflects a crisis of representation resulting from the dominance of capitalism and bureaucracy, but also demonstrates the emergence of new strategies by arts actors in independently reproducing space. In this context, the artists and cultural communities that are the focus of this research can be understood as part of what Richard Florida (2002) calls the creative class, a group of people whose work is based on creativity, innovation and cultural expression.

Florida explains that the creative class includes artists, musicians, writers, architects, designers and other creative workers who favor cities and spaces that are open, participatory and supportive of freedom of expression. They are not only users of space but also producers of meaning, symbols and social networks within the city. Linked to Henri Lefebvre's theoretical framework of spatial production, the creative class plays a role in creating representational space, namely, space that is symbolically interpreted.

Artists, as members of the Creative Class, view the transformation of public space into commercial space as gradually marginalizing artists. Despite these limitations, artists do not remain silent. They moved inward, entering private spaces. Private homes, cramped studios, yards, and even coffee shops in city alleys were transformed into alternative spaces for practice, discussion, production and small performances. These spaces became sites of regeneration of ideas and solidarity.

*In the past, Benteng and the Sositietit de harmonie building were our homes. We gathered there, performing, discussing and watching performances. Even Losari Beach was alive. But now, those spaces are gone. We've retreated to our respective homes."(Interview Hasyimi Ibrahim)*

From the beginning, Shinta has been aware that art is not just about performance, but also about process, space and social relations. Together with Kala Theatre, she initiated the "City in Theater Project," an initiative to intervene in public spaces such as terminals, city parks, and even highways. "When one space is closed off or restricted, such as an arts building, we look for other social spaces to intervene in."

Shinta views space from three layers as developed by Henri Lefebvre: spatial, perceived and represented. According to her, the seizure of spatial representation by capitalism and bureaucracy has alienated public space from its aesthetic and social functions. Shinta emphasizes

the importance of artists' spatial production as a form of resistance against the takeover of space by the government and the private sector. "Art must be able to seize spatial representation. If it can no longer be in public space, we look for private space. But that's not a solution, just a survival strategy."

Shinta's artistic expression is not only present in the form of performance, but also in the ideology of space, namely that art has the right to be present anywhere and anytime, as a social voice, as a form of advocacy, and as a resistance to economic domination of the city.



Picture5; Mega Herdiyanti's performance, Kala Teater, at Malengkeri Terminal. The City in Theater project is a project that explores urban issues through research with city residents, conducted by Kala Teater from 2015 to 2025.  
(Source: tribuntimur.com)

Similarly, Asia Ramli Prapanca, who turned her home into a new space, calls her private space a "little fortress," a symbol of survival and rethinking art.

This phenomenon demonstrates that artists' production of space is shifting from affirmative strategies to forms of resistance. In Henri Lefebvre's terms, this space is representational space, space interpreted subjectively, emotionally and politically by its users. Although small and informal, these spaces foster art as a social practice and cultural struggle.

However, private spaces also bring new limitations. Their limited size makes public participation increasingly exclusive. The direct relationship between artists and audiences that once existed in public spaces is now beginning to erode. Nevertheless, private spaces remain a crucial arena for the production of alternative spaces. This is where artists re-construct ecosystems with small communities, independent archives, online discussion forums and cross-border solidarity networks. Some artists even choose to live together in small complexes to maintain mutual support.

*I invited my artist friends to buy houses in the same complex. It's now known as the artists' complex. We live together, but our struggles remain in our own spaces."(Interview Bahar Merdhu)*

From the private spaces they create, performances, ideas, archives and cultural strategies emerge. This is not simply survival, but resistance.

Within this framework, artists' transition from public to private spaces is not simply a form of resignation, but can be read as a form of alternative spatial production, a space created from below, community-based, and rooted in values of togetherness and resistance.

Spaces such as private homes, small studios, community coffee shops, and semi-open discussion spaces are concrete examples of how the creative class strives to maintain its existence in the face of limited access to formal public spaces. These spaces are animated by a collaborative and functional spirit, becoming crucial venues for social practice, the exchange of ideas, and the sustainability of the arts ecosystem.

## **5. Conclusion**

This research demonstrates that the transformation of art spaces in Makassar City is inextricably linked to the ever-changing social, political, economic and cultural dynamics. Spaces that previously housed the growth and development of artistic expression are now being taken over and commodified by bureaucratic and market forces. This has led to artists experiencing alienation from the spaces they once claimed as part of their collective identity.

Using Henri Lefebvre's theoretical framework of spatial production, this research finds that art spaces in Makassar are produced through three layers: perceived space (physical structures), represented space (policies, dominant narratives) and experienced space (emotional and cultural experiences). The shift from public to private space reflects not only limited access but also a form of cultural resistance to the hegemony of urban spatial dominance.

Public spaces such as Losari Beach and Fort Rotterdam, once places of free expression, have now shifted to represent tourism and the economy. The Societeit de Harmoni building, as a formal art space, experiences a tug-of-war between the interests of the community and government institutions. In this situation, artists are creating alternative spaces in their homes, private studios, and digital platforms as a form of survival and regeneration of artistic practice.

The crisis of sense of place is a major challenge facing artists today. The loss of meaningful physical space also means the loss of a place that shapes the identity, solidarity, and sustainability of the arts community. However, artists' efforts to autonomously create space are an important form of resistance in maintaining art spaces as vibrant social fields.

Makassar, as a city with a long history of community arts, demonstrates that space is not simply a place, but also the result of active social practices and relations. Artists not only occupy space, they create, animate, and maintain it.

This study is expected to contribute to urban cultural studies and open up space for more inclusive city policies for the local arts ecosystem. This research emphasizes that artists' production of space is a political act that goes beyond aesthetics; it is an effort to defend the right to the city and the right to artistic expression.



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