



Visual communication in public space through mural art in Makassar, Indonesia



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Abstract

Mural art serves as a powerful means of visual communication, allowing artists to convey messages, narratives, and ideas through visual elements. Murals often address social, political, cultural, or environmental issues, expressing viewpoints and sparking conversations within the community. This study aims to examine the role and meaning of visual communication in mural art in Makassar City. The object of observation is divided into two, namely mural art that is appropriate in its place and mural art that is not in its place, such as the walls of inhabited houses, shop fences, and public facilities. Through the case study research method conducted in the city of Makassar, the data collected through the observation and interview stages were then analyzed descriptively. The results show that mural art is an alternative form of conveying messages through aesthetic and ethical values. Due to its significant role in arousing one's feelings, the Makassar city government has made mural art an indicator of improving the quality of the city's environment through the Lorong Wisata program. As part of the "Lorong Wisata" program, mural art can be commissioned or encouraged to enhance the visual appeal of the designated lanes. Murals can transform plain walls into vibrant and visually captivating artworks, adding color and character to the surroundings. Mural installations can serve as focal points and landmarks within the tourism lanes, attracting visitors and providing unique photo opportunities.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of mural art in Indonesia reflects the increasing importance of street art as a powerful form of artistic expression and social communication [1]. Mural art creates not only visual beauty but also provides space to voice important issues in Indonesia. Murals are a form of visual art applied directly to walls or other vertical surfaces [3]. The mural phenomenon as a visual communication media in public spaces, such as in other cities in Indonesia, has various impacts and significance [4]. As part of art, Murals provide opportunities for local artists to express their creative expressions. Murals can

reflect culture, history, identity, or social issues that are important to the Makassar community. In the process, mural creation often involves active participation from the local community, especially if the mural is related to community messages or values. It can strengthen citizens' sense of ownership of public space. Murals can beautify public spaces and make them more attractive to visitors, as well as being able to attract tourists and improve the image of the city [5].

Besides that, murals are often used to convey educational or awareness messages related to issues such as the environment, social or political. It can increase public

understanding of issues that are currently to be discussed.

Apart from that, several other mural functions include:

1. As a cultural identity: Murals can help strengthen Makassar's cultural identity. They may depict local traditions, art, or folklore that are important to the local community.
2. As a tourism promotion media: Attractive murals often become a significant tourist attraction. They can attract tourists looking for unique artistic and cultural experiences.
3. As an effort to preserve space: Murals can help protect walls or building surfaces from graffiti or vandalism. They can become an art form that is respected and looked after by society.

In some cases, many mural artists use this media to express social, political, or cultural messages [6]. These works can raise awareness and debate in society, which can accelerate the growth of mural art [7]. So, murals are often referred to as a visual communication media. Visual communication is the process of conveying messages, ideas, or information through visual elements such as images, graphics, illustrations, colors, layouts, and symbols. It is a form of communication that uses visual elements to communicate messages without words or with minimal help of words [8][9]. Visual communication plays an important role in various aspects of daily life, including graphic design, advertising, art, media, and corporate communications [10]. Mural art provides a platform for creative expression for artists. Murals allow artists to create works that are large, striking, and reflect their style [11]. This invites recognition and appreciation for their art, which can motivate artists to continue creating. As mural art has developed, perceptions of street art have changed. Many people now consider mural art to be a legitimate and interesting form of art, not vandalism. This has helped encourage the growth of mural art.

Research on mural art in Indonesia is also an interesting and important topic. So much has been done by previous researchers to understand the role, impact, and development of mural art in various regions, especially in Indonesia. Based on research about Mural Art as Visual Communication: A Study of the Role of Murals in Mediating Social Change in Indonesia, it is known that mural art is a form of visual communication that can mediate social change in Indonesia. In his research, he examined various murals [8]. In

Indonesia and how social and political messages are conveyed through mural art. This research is relevant to research about Murals as Communication Media for Community Empowerment: A Study of Communities and Murals in Semarang City, Indonesia, and regarding Urban Art and the City in Indonesia: Street Art, Community Engagement, and Local Identity in Yogyakarta, where these two studies explain that mural art can be a tool for mobilizing communities and conveying positive messages as well as in forming local identities and interacting with urban environments. These studies provide insight into the role of mural art in Indonesia, including in social, cultural, economic, and urban environmental contexts [8]. They also highlighted the complexity of mural art as a form of street art that is increasingly developing and diverse in various regions in Indonesia.

The development of murals is mostly found in big cities in Indonesia, such as Makassar City. After the pandemic, many government programs encouraged people to be more active in carrying out activities in outdoor spaces. One of the activities carried out by people and communities was to change the atmosphere of road corridors to become lively by applying murals to the corridor walls [12]. Apart from the advantages and benefits of murals that have been explained previously, it turns out that there are also several challenges related to the mural phenomenon in public spaces. One of them is the problem of caring for and maintaining the mural so that it looks good and is not damaged. In addition, it is important to pay attention to permits and regulations regarding murals in Makassar City, including property owner approval and legal issues related to street art.

In the Makassar context, it is important to respect and absorb local cultural values in creating murals, as well as actively involving the community to create a strong relationship between visual arts and the local community. This can ensure that the mural phenomenon becomes a source of pride and a strong identity for Makassar City.

Mural art becomes interesting when understood more deeply. Murals are not just an art of conveying expression but are a media of communication between groups without having to meet or talk directly. Murals are good message mediators. Therefore, this research aims to examine the nature of mural art as a visual communication in Makassar City.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research that is studied based on the description of the case study. Qualitative research is a research methodology that focuses on understanding and interpreting human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena in their natural settings [13]. It aims to explore subjective meanings, perspectives, and the context in which individuals or groups operate. Qualitative research is characterized by its emphasis on words, narratives, and detailed descriptions rather than numerical data.

The research was carried out by processing data descriptively from observations made during the field. Data collection techniques were carried out in purposive sampling and accidental sampling [14]. The selected case study location is Makassar City. The case study method is a research approach that allows for an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon or situation within its real-life context. When using the case study method to study murals in Makassar, Indonesia, the researcher would focus on understanding the particular aspects of mural creation, reception, and impact in that specific city.

In this study, the object of observation was divided into 2 (two), namely mural art that was appropriate in its place (legal media) and mural art that was out of place (illegal media), such as the walls of inhabited houses, shop fences, and public facilities, especially in road corridor areas in central trade and business areas.

The researcher would collect data through various methods, such as interviews, observations, document analysis, and photography. Interviews can be conducted with mural artists, community members, local authorities, or other stakeholders involved in the mural creation process. Observations may involve documenting the creation process, public interactions with the murals, or community events related to mural art. Relevant documents like articles, news reports, or historical records can provide additional insights. The data needed include:

1. Media murals; Such as the walls of inhabited houses, shop fences, and public facilities
2. Artists; Such as art communities, individuals, both teenagers, children and adults
3. The concept and theme of the mural; reflect culture, history, local identity, or social issues, or about social, cultural, economic and urban environmental contexts.
4. Duration of work; about how long does it take to work on a mural.

The collected data would be analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques. This may involve transcribing and coding interviews, identifying themes or patterns within the data, and analyzing visual elements of the murals. The researcher would interpret the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the case, paying attention to the cultural, social, and historical context of Makassar.

To understand the specific context of Makassar, the researcher would explore the socio-cultural factors, historical background, and urban dynamics that influence mural creation and reception. This understanding helps in interpreting the significance of the murals within the local context and the broader Indonesian or regional context.

The findings of the case study in a comprehensive and detailed manner. This may include describing the motivations and themes of the murals, discussing the community's responses and engagement, and analyzing the impact of murals on the urban landscape and cultural identity of Makassar. The report should provide a rich narrative that captures the complexities and nuances of the case. This study approach allows for a deeper understanding of how murals contribute to the cultural landscape, community engagement, and social discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mural art phenomenon in Indonesia

Mural art is a form of visual expression that involves creating large-scale artworks directly on walls or other permanent surfaces. It is a public art form that often engages with the community and communicates messages, narratives, or aesthetic experiences. Murals are characterized by their significant size, often covering entire walls or building facades. Their large scale allows artists to create immersive and impactful visual experiences that can't be achieved on smaller canvases.

Murals are predominantly created in public spaces, such as city streets, parks, and buildings. By utilizing these public spaces, mural art becomes accessible to a wide audience, including passersby, residents, and visitors. It brings art out of traditional gallery settings and into the public realm. Furthermore, murals have a long history of conveying narratives, stories, and messages. They can depict historical events, cultural symbols, mythological tales, or contemporary issues. Murals often serve as visual storytelling devices, capturing the attention of viewers and inviting them to interpret and engage with the artwork.

Murals have been used as a means of cultural expression, celebrating local traditions, customs, and heritage. Artists may incorporate cultural symbols, imagery, and themes that reflect the identity and diversity of a particular community or region. Mural art often involves collaboration between artists and the local community. Community members may participate in the creation process, share their stories, or provide input on the artwork. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership, unity, and community pride.

In frequently, murals employed to address social and political issues. Artists use their works to communicate messages of social justice, equality, human rights, and environmental awareness. Murals can spark conversations, challenge prevailing norms, and encourage critical thinking. Moreover, murals can transform the visual landscape of a neighborhood or city by adding color, vibrancy, and artistic expression. They contribute to urban beautification, turning otherwise plain or neglected surfaces into visually appealing and engaging spaces. Mural art is a dynamic and powerful form of public expression that utilizes large-scale visuals to engage viewers, communicate messages, celebrate culture, and foster community connections.

The history of mural art dates back thousands of years and has been present in various cultures around the world. Murals have been created as a form of artistic expression, storytelling, religious or political communication, and community engagement. The history of mural art is vast and diverse, with different cultures and time periods contributing their unique styles, themes, and techniques to this art form. Murals have served as powerful medias for storytelling, cultural expression, and social commentary throughout human history.

In architecture, the aesthetic element is one of the basic principles of architecture put forward by Vitruvius [15]. One of the aesthetic elements that we often find in a public space is mural art. Mural art is an art form that uses walls as its media. Mural comes from the word 'murus', a Latin word that means wall. In a contemporary sense, a mural means a large painting made on a wall (interior or exterior), ceiling, or others flat surface [16]. A mural is a large painting made to support an architectural space. If this definition is translated further, murals cannot be separated from buildings, in this case, walls [17]. Walls are seen not only as room dividers or just elements that must exist in a house or building but walls also seen as a media to beautify a room [18][19].

Besides having an aesthetic value that can beautify a city, murals are also an effective media for conveying messages [20]. Therefore, murals can be used by the community as a media to channel their aspirations because through mural art the socialization that is carried out is expected to be more communicative in entering public spaces.

As shown in Figure 1, it can be stated that mural art is a form of public art that uses walls or other large permanent surfaces as its canvas or media. Murals can be found in both indoor and outdoor spaces, and are often created to convey a message, celebrate cultural heritage, or simply add aesthetic value to a community or building. Mural art has a long history that can be traced back to ancient times, when people painted images on the walls of caves or temples. In more recent times, murals have been used to depict social and political issues, and have become a popular means of expression for artists around the world.



Figure 1. Mural art in the street corridor [20]

Murals can be created using a variety of materials and techniques, including paint, tiles, mosaics, and even digital projection. They can range in size from small, intimate pieces to large-scale, multi-story installations. Mural art is a powerful and dynamic art form that has the ability to engage and inspire audiences in unique and impactful ways.

Mural art as a media for conveying messages is also widely used by companies as an advertising media. Through the messages plastered on the paintings on the walls of public spaces, it is hoped that people who see the advertisements will be able to obtain product information. It is usually for new products to form the first demand or to persuade the public to compare the advantages of their products compared to competitors' brands to forms selective demand for the company's brand, advertising media like this are expected to bring knowledge. and affective motivation simultaneously to society. In addition, the message in the advertisement is displayed by the company because it aims to convince people who have consumed it that they have made the right choice by consuming the product [21].

Overall, the existence of works of art theoretically has three kinds of functions: personal functions, social functions, and physical functions. Personal function as an instrument of personal expression, art is not limited to itself. This means that it is not solely done based on personal emotions, but based on personal views on common problems experienced by artists, which later become artists translating through symbols that form general patterns of pila. In modern art, personal elements are highly valued, especially in works of art that prioritize aesthetics as the main goal of the work's presence.

Meanwhile, in the social function, all works of art are always related to society because works of art are created for appreciators [22]. Even if a work of art is made solely for the maker, it cannot be denied that all creators (artists) expect something from the people who live it, whether the people will accept it with awe and appreciate it [23]. As a consequence, the works of art that are composed or created are social responses with personal encouragement, as well as having a social function [21]. Furthermore, the physical function meant a creation that can be physically used for practical daily needs besides the beauty of item itself.

From the explanation, it is understood that mural art was created by an artist (personal) which is then visualized on walls in public spaces to become public consumption (shown in Figure 2).



Figure 2. Mural art festival in Yogyakarta [25]

The mural art also has practical needs, namely that people can directly enjoy the aesthetic value that has been visualized artistically. So that it can also be said that mural art has functions in various aspects, including politics, socio-culture, aesthetics, economy, and education.

Based on research about Planning In The Era of Uncertainty: Art, Activism, and the 'Creative Kampung': A Case Study from Dago Pojok, Bandung, Indonesia, examines the intersection of art, activism, and urban planning in the context of Dago Pojok, a neighborhood in Bandung, Indonesia. This study likely examines the role of art and activism in shaping urban spaces and driving social change [24]. It may explore how artistic interventions and activist initiatives can challenge dominant narratives, engage communities, and promote alternative visions for urban development. The study focusses on the concept of the 'Creative Kampung' in Dago Pojok. A 'kampung' is an Indonesian term for a traditional neighborhood or village. To investigate how the integration of creative practices and cultural activities in the neighborhood has transformed its social fabric and enhanced community participation.

However, mural art is sometimes created in inappropriate media, thereby reducing the visual aesthetic value (shown in Figure 3). This problem occurs due to the lack of space provided by the local government for artists to convey ideas through murals.

Initially, mural art in Makassar City did not receive a positive response from the public. Most of the mural works were made in an 'illegal' media, its harmed other parties. However, over time mural art began to receive special attention from the city government and the community. Thus, this study aims to examine the role and meaning of visual communication in mural art in Makassar City.



Figure 3. One of the visual problems through murals [25]

Mural art phenomenon in Makassar

Mural art in Makassar City can be found in various public spaces, such as residential alleys and schools. As previously explained, this study is divided into 2 (two) observations.

Mural art on an illegal media

This mural art can be found in street corridors, empty/uninhabited houses, and shophouses. At the beginning of the development of murals in Makassar City, the artists did not have space to be creative and work, so not a few artists poured their creations into a media they shouldn't have. This becomes a new problem in the urban paradigm. From an artistic point of view, murals provide aesthetic value in their creation because they are full of meaning. Through murals, artists can convey aspirations, messages, and criticisms through pictures. As shown in Figure 4, it can be stated that the murals convey aspirations and criticisms through pictures in empty/uninhabited houses.

Murals made in inappropriate media/media can be troubling to some parties, such as murals on shophouse walls that shouldn't be done because shop owners feel disadvantaged so that their impression of aesthetic mural art turns into streaks that damage aesthetics (shown in Figure 5). This problem has attracted the attention of the city government to accommodate the aspirations of mural artists and launched the Lorong Wisata program to accommodate the space requirements for mural artists in Makassar City.

From this study it can be concluded that mural art in this category uses:

- a) Media murals: Using illegal media in the form of house walls or shop walls.
- b) Performers / artists: Most of the mural artists in this category are teenagers aged 14-17 years
- c) The concept and theme of the mural: The theme of the mural is a form of criticism and

protest against government policies and socio-political issues.

Duration of work: Generally done in a hurry and completed in a fairly short time, ranging from 1-3 hours.

Mural art on legal media

This mural art has obtained permission from related parties or the local government. This mural art can be found on alley walls in residential areas as those found in residential alleys that are the target of the Lorong Wisata Program, and on public road corridors such as those found on Jalan Mannuruki IV RW 3, Mannuruki Village, Tamalate District, as well as Jalan Monumen Emmy Saellan IV RW 2 Makassar city.

a. Tour Alley

Lorong Wisata is a Makassar City government program that involves sub-district heads in implementing the program as a new attraction for the tourism sector in the city of Makassar.



Figure 4. Mural at the guard post [26]



Figure 5. Mural in front of a shophouse on Jalan Sulawesi [26]

As shown in [Figure 6](#) and [Figure 8](#), it can be stated that the concept of the tourist alley uses murals as decorative ornaments and tourist vocal points. Streets as public spaces become more memorable and more aesthetically pleasing with mural art. The message implied in the mural painting is an educational media for the local community and people who visit Lorong Street.

Most of the mural artists in the city of Makassar are teenagers who have dropped out of school, so the Lorong Wisata program can improve people's lives and minimize narcotics abuse among Makassar youth. Murals' theme in the Lorong Wisata program is Makassar's local wisdom, such as culinary arts, cultural arts, city icons, and environmental preservation messages (shown in [Figure 7](#)). With the aim that the public and tourists can get to know Makassar's local wisdom. As it is known that a mural is not just a painting but a message presented in the form of a mural. So that it strengthens the essence of the mural as an art that emphasizes political values to a more varied artistic value.

b. Road boundary wall

As shown in [Figure 9](#), it can be stated that on Jalan Mannuruki IV RW 3, a mural drawn on a wall approximately 300 meters long carries the theme of Makassar's Local Wisdom, such as the Sultan Hasanuddin, Makassar Bugis dance.



Figure 6. Mural in one of the tourist alleys on Jl Bambapuang, Lariangbangi Village



Figure 7. The process of making a mural on Jalan Mannuruki IV



Figure 8. Mural on Jalan Somba Opu Lr 293

The others resulting from the collaboration of Kampung Mannuruki with students from the Faculty of Engineering, the Indonesian Muslim University, as well as the community creative and mural creator of Makassar.

The mural as shown in [Figure 10](#) has its character compared to other murals. Based on observations, this mural tends towards a decorative style with brilliant colors and the theme of a friendly and cultured Makassar city that shows the quality of fine art. In addition, there are several symbols as objects of painting, namely Makassar city icons such as the mandala monument, and the Graha Pena Building, and several cultural symbols that become an integral part of the mural theme. Based on observations, the style of wall painting in terms of flat coloring without depth clearly shows a thick decorative style. The depiction of humans using cartoon techniques on traditional Makassar clothing with bright and flat colors shows a prominent decorative style. Apart from that, in terms of the coloring of the mural (shown in [Figure 11](#)), it is more dominant to use a prominent and striking base color, even though white is a symbol of floating clouds to fill in the blanks in the space so that the color of the mural is not monotonous. The white background with the floating cloud symbol gives a special feel and impression.



Figure 9. Mural along Mannuruki IV street



Figure 10. Makassar themed mural on Jalan Mannuruki IV



Figure 11. A number of residents spend the night chatting in one of the alleys or alleys of the settlement in the Buakana Village, Rappocini District



Figure 12. Four alleys are an attraction for children to play

Street as transportation routes become more attractive and give an impression to anyone who crosses them through the mural art on the street walls (shown in Figure 12). Not a few people from the city come to just watch the mural work and take pictures against the backdrop of the mural. Monotonous walls are transformed into masterpieces that attract public attention. From the results of this study, it is known that public space should be able to accommodate community activities and activities so that public space can be enjoyed and utilized optimally by the community.

The Lorong Wisata or *Longwis* program in Makassar is not just beautifying the alleys to make them clean and beautiful. However, these narrow passages or alleys become houses,

playrooms, and living rooms for the residents. The hallway is also the place to start post-pandemic recovery.

From the explanation, it can be concluded that mural art in this category uses:

- a) Media murals: Using legal media in the form of a street corridor wall. This media has been used as a forum for channeling mural talent for the young generation of Makassar City and has become part of the Lorong Wisata Movement which is one of the flagship programs of the Makassar city government.
- b) Performers/artists: This category of mural artists includes all ages and backgrounds. And in several locations, it was done in collaboration between groups of mural artists and students.
- c) The concept and theme of the mural: The mural's theme is local wisdom because it reinforces the local tourism concept of Makassar City.
- d) Duration of work: Generally done gradually and about 1-2 weeks.

Visual communication is not necessarily only able to provide solutions to existing problems and only related to visual execution, but also able to choose the rights and relevant media to build communication with the public. The mural is an effective media, and recently it used as a media for conveying messages visually. Apart from being seen as a product of mass culture, the murals were done in cooperation and then developed into mass mobilizers to convey messages together.

Several studies have revealed the visual and psychological impact of murals in urban environments or public spaces. They explore how murals can influence mood, people's perception of their surroundings, and even safety in certain areas. This is also relevant to the results of this research that took place in the city of Makassar where murals reflect the cultural and historical values of a place. People can learn the cultural messages conveyed through murals which are represented through local identity, and how to maintain culture. heritage through street art.

CONCLUSION

Mural art and visual communication have a close relationship because mural art is one of the most striking and powerful forms of visual communication. Mural art uses visual elements such as images, colors, layouts and illustrations to convey messages, ideas or emotions. This is the essence of visual communication. Each mural has a message or narrative to convey. These messages can range from social, political, cultural messages, to purely aesthetic messages.

Visual communication is used in murals to facilitate conveying this message to viewers.

From the results of this research it is known that Murals change the character and appearance of the space in which they are located. This makes murals a form of visual communication with the physical environment. They can change the walls of a building, create an identity for an area, or change the image of the neighborhood. In fact, Murals are often used to communicate social and political messages, raise important issues in society, or protest injustice. They can have a significant social impact.

In these ways, mural art becomes not only a beautiful art form but also a powerful visual communication media that influences, inspires, and interacts with society and the surrounding environment.

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