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Identifying Place Distinctiveness in Urban Tourism and Heritage Areas of Makassar, Indonesia

Anugrah Ramadhan
Alexander Adrian Saragi

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Abstract

Makassar is a city with a highly strategic role, particularly in the social and cultural aspects of South Sulawesi Province and the eastern region of Indonesia. The city also possesses a diverse history and distribution of urban and heritage tourism sites. As the largest city in eastern Indonesia, its rapid urban growth has created challenges, including the potential loss of identity or distinctiveness in its urban and heritage tourism areas. Therefore, it is essential to identify the distinctiveness that still exists in several urban and heritage tourism objects in Makassar, such as Fort Rotterdam, the Makassar City Museum, the Mandala Monument, the 99 Domes Mosque, and the Makassar Cathedral Church. This study employs descriptive statistical methods and quantitative data to generate quality data based on the percentage results of 80 respondents. The findings of this research are expected to be useful for relevant authorities in efforts to preserve the city's identity.

Keywords:
Distinctiveness, identity, Makassar, urban and heritage tourism

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Correspondence address:
Anugrah Ramadhan,
Architecture Study Program,
Faculty of Engineering,
Universitas Negeri Makassar,
Makassar City, Indonesia
Email:
anugrahramadhan231101@gmail.com

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Introduction

Major cities in Indonesia have undergone rapid development, resulting in increasingly homogeneous spatial characteristics. This tendency has been driven largely by globalization and the extensive expansion of modern development. Uncontrolled urbanization has contributed to land-use conversions that are inconsistent with established spatial plans, giving rise to various urban problems, including informal settlements, traffic congestion, and increasing pressure on natural resources (Rosalia and Fransisco 2024). This phenomenon has gradually diminished urban distinctiveness, particularly the identity and visual and spatial characteristics that differentiate one city from another. Place identity is a concept used to describe a set of values and knowledge formed through individuals' cognitive perceptions of a particular place (Jorgensen and Stedman 2001). Identity is also understood as a dynamic social product emerging from the interaction between human experience and memory (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996). Within this context, urban distinctiveness refers to the unique character generated through the interplay of physical, social, cultural, and historical elements that collectively shape the image and identity of a city.

Breakwell conceptualizes four principles underlying place identity: (1) distinctiveness, referring to the qualities that make a place unique or distinguishable; (2) continuity, denoting an individual's sustained connection with a place through temporal and experiential attachment; (3) self-esteem, referring to the sense of self-worth or pride supported by one's association with a place; and (4) self-efficacy, describing an individual's perceived ability to function effectively within and through the support provided by a particular environment (Breakwell 2015). Within place identity theory, distinctiveness specifically refers to the perceived uniqueness and differentiation of a particular place in comparison with other places (Hawke 2010) [v]. Accordingly, distinctiveness provides an important conceptual framework for understanding how particular spatial, architectural, cultural, and historical attributes contribute to the formation and recognition of urban identity.

As one of the largest cities in eastern Indonesia, Makassar possesses considerable potential for urban and heritage tourism. Its strategic position as a major center of economic activity and an important regional hub for eastern Indonesia has made the city an attractive destination for migration, investment, and commercial activities, thereby accelerating its transformation into a metropolitan center. Makassar's urban core has consequently become a highly complex concentration of population, economic activities, mobility, and urban development. This intensification of urban activities has increasingly placed historic buildings and the traditional urban fabric under pressure, creating potential threats to the continuity and preservation of the city's architectural heritage (Asmunandar 2020).

Nevertheless, the spatial transformation associated with economic growth, infrastructure development, and commercial expansion has often occurred without an integrated planning approach that adequately accommodates and reinforces historical values, architectural heritage, and local character. Consequently, such transformations may contribute to the degradation of place identity, the erosion of urban distinctiveness, and the declining attractiveness of heritage-based tourism areas. A comprehensive investigation of the elements that constitute urban distinctiveness is therefore essential to identify the physical, spatial, socio-cultural, and historical attributes that differentiate Makassar's urban tourism and heritage areas. Such an understanding can provide an empirical and conceptual basis for formulating strategies to strengthen the distinctiveness of urban tourism and heritage areas while maintaining their local identity and heritage values within the dynamics of contemporary urban development.

The concept of place identity has become an important issue in urban studies, particularly in understanding how an urban area is perceived, experienced, and remembered by individuals and communities (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983). This study focuses on identifying and analyzing the spatial characteristics that shape the distinctiveness of urban tourism and heritage areas in Makassar, as well as examining how these elements can be integrated into urban spatial planning policies and design strategies. By developing a comprehensive understanding of urban distinctiveness, the development of tourism areas is expected to extend beyond economic considerations and contribute to safeguarding the continuity of the city's historical and cultural values. Such an approach is essential for ensuring that contemporary urban development reinforces place identity while maintaining the distinctive spatial, architectural, and cultural attributes that characterize Makassar's urban heritage.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative research approach structured into six sequential stages: (1) defining the scope and content of the study through a literature review related to the research objects and the parameters of distinctiveness; (2) formulating the research parameters and variables based on relevant theoretical frameworks; (3) categorizing the constituent elements of distinctiveness within each research object according to the established parameters and variables; (4) developing a questionnaire designed to measure the identified parameters and variables across the selected research objects; (5) administering the questionnaire to 100 respondents from the local community; and (6) quantitatively analyzing the questionnaire results to identify patterns and determine the key factors contributing to the distinctiveness of each study area. The results of this analysis were subsequently synthesized to formulate the conclusions of the study.

Research location and objects

The research objects were selected to represent prominent urban tourism and heritage sites in Makassar City, comprising Fort Rotterdam, the Makassar City Museum, the Mandala Monument, the 99-Dome Mosque, and the Makassar Cathedral. The scope of analysis encompassed not only the principal buildings but also their associated landscape settings, spatial configurations, and relationships with the surrounding urban context. These five sites were selected because of their historical significance, architectural and spatial characteristics, and their capacity to represent the diverse layers of Makassar's urban identity. Collectively, they provide a relevant basis for examining how architectural form, landscape, historical values, and surrounding urban relationships contribute to the formation of distinctiveness within Makassar's tourism and heritage areas.

Results and discussion

Physical characteristics of the research objects

The physical distinctiveness of Fort Rotterdam is prominently expressed through its distinctive overall configuration, which resembles the form of a turtle. The main entrance gate conveys a monumental and imposing architectural character through its solid composition, textured door surfaces, arched ornamental elements, and the inscription bearing the fort's name positioned above the gateway. These architectural features contribute to the fort's strong visual identity and reinforce its recognition as a significant heritage landmark within the urban landscape of Makassar. Fort Rotterdam occupies an area of approximately 3 hectares, with perimeter walls ranging from approximately 5 to 7 meters in height and measuring approximately 2 meters in thickness. The main entrance is situated on the western side of the fort and features a double-leaf door (kupu tarung) constructed from merbau timber. A similar double-leaf configuration is also applied to the windows of the buildings within the fort complex (Jumardi and Suswandari 2018). The combination of the fort's distinctive morphology, massive defensive walls, entrance configuration, locally characteristic timber elements, and architectural details establishes a strong physical character that contributes to its distinctiveness within Makassar's urban and heritage context.



Figure 1
Fort Rotterdam, Makassar

The Makassar City Museum building incorporates the Garden City concept, an urban and architectural planning approach that developed in the early twentieth century. This concept is spatially manifested through the placement of the building within a relatively extensive open setting, with landscaped yards surrounding the front, sides, and rear of the building. Its architectural characteristics are further expressed through large-scale doors, windows, and ventilation openings distributed across all four façades, providing a strong relationship between the interior spaces and the surrounding environment. The tropical architectural character of the former gemeentehuis building is particularly evident in its hipped roof (limasan), which features a relatively steep pitch (Rachmawati, Mattin, and Adinda 2022). The combination of the Garden City spatial configuration, extensive surrounding open spaces, large façade openings, and climate-responsive roof form contributes to the building's physical distinctiveness. These elements simultaneously reflect its historical architectural identity and adaptation to Makassar's tropical climatic conditions.



Figure 2
Makassar City Museum

The Mandala Monument for the Liberation of West Irian in Makassar is a significant historical landmark with strategic value for supporting historical education and strengthening a sense of national identity and collective memory. The monument was constructed to commemorate the success of Operation Trikora in the campaign for the integration of West Irian in 1962. Its architectural expression is characterized by a triangular geometric form, symbolizing the Tri Komando Rakyat (Three People's Commands), which represents Indonesia's struggle against colonialism (Safarani 2023). The integration of monumental geometry, historical symbolism, and commemorative function gives the Mandala Monument a strong architectural and symbolic distinctiveness. Its triangular composition functions not merely as a formal architectural feature but also as a physical representation of historical narratives and collective memory. Consequently, the monument contributes to the formation of Makassar's urban identity by connecting architectural form with the historical and socio-cultural meanings embedded within the city's urban landscape.



Figure 3
Mandala Monument

Makassar is one of the major cities in eastern Indonesia with considerable urban tourism potential, one of its prominent contemporary landmarks being the 99-Dome Mosque, also known as the Asmaul Husna Mosque, located within the Center Point of Indonesia (CPI) development area. From an architectural perspective, the 99-Dome Mosque is recognized as one of the most distinctive contemporary mosques in eastern Indonesia. Its architectural character is primarily defined by the composition of its numerous domes, distinctive geometric forms, and visually expressive façade, which collectively establish a strong and recognizable image within Makassar's waterfront landscape. The mosque demonstrates particular strengths in terms of visual quality and architectural aesthetics, achieved through an expressive articulation of form and its relationship with the surrounding landscape and waterfront setting. These characteristics have transformed the mosque beyond its primary religious function into a prominent urban landmark and tourism destination, attracting both domestic and international visitors for religious activities as well as architectural and recreational experiences (Bahrun and Ramadhani 2024). Accordingly, the integration of symbolic architectural form, visual prominence, aesthetic expression, and strategic spatial positioning contributes significantly to the mosque's distinctiveness and reinforces its role in shaping the contemporary urban identity of Makassar.



Figure 4
99 Dome Mosque

The Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church (GKHYYK) also known as the Makassar Cathedral is the oldest church in Makassar and, indeed, in the entire South and Southeast Sulawesi region. It is a cultural heritage site that retains its original form to this day, appearing exactly as it did when first constructed. The church's beauty is enhanced by its lush, leafy surroundings. Situated on the western side of Karebosi Square, this place of worship is easily accessible to both local congregants and out-of-town tourists (Yunani 2018).



Figure 5
Makassar Cathedral

Identifying distinctiveness in the research objects

According to Ginting, Nasution, and Rahman (2017), the principles of distinctiveness are defined by several variables: landmark, uniqueness, particular character, and perception. These variables will be used to identify the distinctiveness of the following research objects: Fort Rotterdam, the Mandala Monument, the Makassar City Museum, the 99-Dome Mosque, and the Makassar Cathedral.

Research respondent data

A total of 80 respondents participated in this study. They were domestic tourists who had previously visited the research site. The respondents fell within the 15–30 age range and included individuals from Makassar City and its surrounding areas, as well as tourists from outside the city.

Landmarks on the research object

A landmark serves as a more effective identifier if it possesses a distinct and unique form within its setting, forms part of a sequence of landmarks (facilitating comfortable orientation), and exhibits a distinct scale (Chapman and Lynch 1962). Respondents cited the following reasons for selecting the 99-Dome Mosque as a landmark: its uniqueness (34.8%), its specific significance (28.8%), its status as a local landmark (19.7%), ease of access (12.1%), and its function as a distant landmark (4.5%). For respondents, the uniqueness of a building specifically its physical attributes and function is a key reason why an area or structure becomes easily recognizable and a focal point, leading them to perceive it as a landmark. Landmarks facilitate city navigation and location recognition when they possess a distinct identity and clear form (Khasbi and Susanti 2022). An object is easily recognized if it possesses unique characteristics that make it memorable and easy to describe (Weyand and Leibe 2015).

True to its name, the 99-Dome Mosque features 99 domes symbolizing the Asmaul Husna (the 99 Names of Allah in Islam) and is characterized by a dominant orange and white color scheme, making it highly recognizable and a focal point.

Fort Rotterdam secured second place, garnering 28.8% of the respondents' votes. Respondents cited specific reasons for their choice: 8.75% valued its significance (historical or otherwise), another 8.75% highlighted the site's uniqueness, and 7.5% identified it as a local landmark. These figures indicate that respondents prioritize building elements possessing historical or other forms of significance along with unique characteristics that allow them to serve as local landmarks as the primary factors defining a landmark. Fort Rotterdam is located at Jalan Ujung Pandang No. 1, Bulogading Ward, Ujung Pandang District, Makassar City, South Sulawesi. The fort is easily accessible, situated within Makassar City directly across from the city's seaport and approximately two kilometers from Losari Beach. It is about a 30-minute drive by car or motorcycle from Sultan Hasanuddin International Airport, while the journey from Soekarno-Hatta Port takes only 15 minutes.

As shown in table 1, the Mandala Monument ranked third among the sites selected by respondents; the primary reason cited was the site's specific significance (6.25% of responses). This was followed by the site's uniqueness (2.5%) and its status as a local landmark (1.25%). Two other sites selected less frequently as landmarks were the Makassar City Museum (8.8%) and the Cathedral Church (1.25%).

Table 1
Landmarks on the research object

Landmark	**Fort Rotterdam**	**Makassar City Museum**	**Mandala Monument**	**99 Dome Mosque**	**Makassar Cathedral**
Figure					
Respondents	20	7	8	44	1
%	25%	8,8%	10%	55%	1,2%

These findings highlight and reinforce the primary reasons respondents identified specific objects as landmarks: uniqueness, symbolic significance, and status as a local landmark. Less frequently cited reasons included ease of access (selected by 12.5% of respondents) and functioning as a distant landmark (5%). These figures suggest that accessibility remains a limitation and that respondents rarely perceive these objects as distant landmarks for the area.

Uniqueness of the research object

"Uniqueness" refers to a distinctive quality that respondents can perceive or observe when present at the research site. The uniqueness of a place is an aspect closely linked to the concept of distinctiveness (Ginting et al. 2018).

The element of uniqueness can be explained through three indicators, as shown in table 2:

The 99-Dome Mosque stands out as the attraction with the most unique characteristics, while the Mandala Monument holds the lowest rating. This is likely because the Mandala Monument bears a resemblance to icons and monuments found in other regions, such as Monas.

Uniqueness	Fort Rotterdam	Makassar City Museum	Mandala Monument	99 Dome Mosque	Makassar Cathedral
Rating	4.31	4.03	3.91	4.54	4.17

Table 2
The unique characteristics of the five research objects

The second indicator is the object's physical uniqueness, such as its ornamentation or architectural form. This indicates that the majority of respondents chose Fort Rotterdam, while the Cathedral received the fewest votes.

Physical uniqueness	Fort Rotterdam	Makassar City Museum	Mandala Monument	99 Dome Mosque	Makassar Cathedral
Respondents	39	6	5	27	3
%	48.8%	7.5%	6.3%	33.8%	3.7%

Table 3
Physical uniqueness of the five research objects

The third indicator concerns the availability of adequate primary and supporting facilities or, in other words, the utilization of the building itself as a tourist attraction. Differing perceptions regarding tourism facilities reflect variations in views or opinions based on an individual's experience with the facilities at the visited site (Ginting et al. 2018). Findings regarding this third indicator reveal that, based on respondents' experiences, the 99-Dome Mosque (Masjid Kubah 99) possesses superior primary and supporting facilities, which contribute to the site's unique appeal. The mosque's primary facilities include a men's prayer hall with a capacity of 3,800 worshippers, a women's prayer hall with a capacity of 1,000 worshippers, and a mosque courtyard capable of accommodating up to 8,000 worshippers. Supporting facilities at the 99-Dome Mosque include parking areas and a semi-basement; ablution areas and restrooms (comprising 42 units each for women and men); a management office; a bookstore and Muslim fashion shop; shoe lockers and drinking water stations; and mosque gardens.

	Fort Rotterdam	Makassar City Museum	Mandala Monument	99 Dome Mosque	Makassar Cathedral
Respondents	21	19	6	29	5
%	26.3%	23.8%	7.5%	36.3%	6.3%

Table 4
Adequate facilities at the five research sites

Specific characteristics of the research object

Particular characteristics or ciri khas when translated into Indonesian within the context of tourism and heritage can be identified through physical characteristics, physical activities, and tourism activities.

Table 5
Specific characteristics of the research object

Particular Characteristic	Fort Rotterdam	Makassar City Museum	Mandala Monument	99 Dome Mosque	Makassar Cathedral
Respondents	30	8	4	34	4
%	37.5%	10%	5%	42.5%	5%

Regarding the questionnaire, the question supporting the data on physical characteristics asked respondents to what extent specific landmarks reflect the identity and character of the Makassar city area. The results show that the 99-Dome Mosque (Masjid Kubah 99) received the most votes (42.5%), followed by the Makassar City Museum (25%). Next in the rankings were Fort Rotterdam (17.5%) and the Mandala Monument (12.5%), with the Cathedral Church receiving the fewest votes (2.5%). These findings reinforce the conclusion that the unique physical characteristics of the 99-Dome Mosque attract the most attention from respondents.

Based on the questionnaire data regarding the most appealing tourism activities at these sites, the majority of respondents (38.8%) selected Fort Rotterdam, followed by the 99 Domes Mosque (31.3%), the Makassar City Museum (15%), the Mandala Monument (8.8%), and finally the Cathedral (6.3%). This indicates that Fort Rotterdam offers more dominant tourism activities compared to the other sites. The "heritage walk" the primary activity at Fort Rotterdam stands out as the most dominant activity among the five sites, a finding reinforced by the comparative questionnaire data. Cultural activities unique to a specific area can serve as a major draw for visitors, as many seek unique and distinctive experiences when visiting a new destination (Ginting and Michaela 2020).

Table 6
The most interesting tourism activities at the research site

Interesting tourist activities	Fort Rotterdam	Makassar City Museum	Mandala Monument	99 Dome Mosque	Makassar Cathedral
Respondents	31	12	5	25	7
%	38.8%	15%	6.3%	31.3%	8.8%

The data indicates that Fort Rotterdam features the most prominent heritage activity, garnering 48.8% of the votes, followed by the Makassar City Museum with 30%, the 99-Dome Mosque with 16.2%, and the Mandala Monument and the Cathedral Church, which are tied at 2.5% each.

Perception

Perception refers to the impression formed by respondents when visiting the research sites. Perceptions vary in relation to cultural activities, as such activities generate meaning, identity, and urban values (Phetsuriya and Heath 2021). Questionnaire data regarding the intensity of the atmosphere at the five sites indicate that the majority of respondents selected Fort Rotterdam, as shown in the following diagram:

Table 7
Positive perception of the research object

Perception	Fort Rotterdam	Makassar City Museum	Mandala Monument	99 Dome Mosque	Makassar Cathedral
Respondents	28	16	10	23	3
%	35%	20%	12.5%	28.7%	3.7%

The impressions gathered from the respondents indicate their willingness to revisit the five sites. This variable reflects the positivity of the impression left by each site, which drives the respondents' desire to return. The majority of respondents expressed a desire to revisit the sites as follows: 38.8% for Fort Rotterdam, 31.3% for the 99 Domes Mosque, 15% for the Makassar City Museum, 8.8% for the Cathedral, and 6.3% for the Mandala Monument.

Table 8
The research site I most want to visit again

	Fort Rotterdam	Makassar City Museum	Mandala Monument	99 Dome Mosque	Makassar Cathedral
Respondents	31	12	15	25	7
%	38.8%	15%	6.3%	31.3%	8.8%

Conclusions

The distinctiveness of the research sites in Makassar which serves as a factor shaping the identity of the city's tourism and heritage areas can be examined through four key variables: landmarks, uniqueness, particular characteristics, and perception. Research findings regarding five specific sites Fort Rotterdam, the Makassar City Museum, the Mandala Monument, the 99 Domes Mosque, and the Makassar Cathedral reveal that each site contributes differently to establishing the image and identity of the urban area.

In terms of landmarks, the 99-Dome Mosque ranked first as the most recognizable object among respondents, commanding 55% of the selections. This indicates that its visual uniqueness, symbolic significance, and ability to serve as a focal point make it the area's most prominent landmark. The presence of 99 domes embodying the philosophy of the Asmaul Husna (the 99 Names of God) combined with the building's distinctive color scheme, reinforces the respondents' visual memory of the structure. Fort Rotterdam secured the next position, chosen for its historical value, unique architectural form, and role as a local landmark in Makassar. Meanwhile, other sites such as the Mandala Monument, the Makassar City Museum, and the Cathedral Church received lower percentages, suggesting that the appeal of a landmark is largely driven by visual elements and the meanings associated with the object.

Regarding the "uniqueness" variable, respondents demonstrated a strong awareness of the sites' distinctive qualities. The 99-Dome Mosque (Masjid 99 Kubah) received the highest rating for possessing uniqueness unmatched by other locations, while Fort Rotterdam stood out due to the unique physical characteristics of its architecture. This demonstrates that uniqueness can stem from either innovative modern architectural design or authentic historical heritage. In terms of facilities, the 99-Dome Mosque once again ranked highest, indicating that the quality of both primary and supporting facilities contributes to the unique nature of the tourism experience. Thus, uniqueness is defined not only by visual appeal but also by functionality and the comfort experienced by visitors.

Regarding "particular characteristics," the most prominent features for respondents were tourism activities and the representation of the area's identity. The 99-Dome Mosque (Masjid 99 Kubah) was perceived as best reflecting the character of Makassar City through its physical form and status as a coastal landmark. However, Fort Rotterdam took the lead in terms of the most engaging tourism activities. Heritage walks, the exploration of historical spaces, and visitor engagement in educational experiences gave the fort a distinctive activity profile that stood out compared to other sites. These findings demonstrate that a place's unique characteristics are shaped not only by physical elements but also by the tourism experiences that take place there.

Regarding the perception variable, Fort Rotterdam made the strongest impression on respondents. Its rich historical atmosphere, exploratory experience, and cultural appeal make it the site visitors most wish to revisit. Meanwhile, the 99 Domes Mosque also garnered highly positive perceptions as a destination for religious tourism and public engagement. These positive perceptions demonstrate that emotional experiences and lasting impressions are crucial factors in reinforcing the site's identity in the minds of visitors.

Based on the identification of distinctiveness elements derived from tourist preferences, it is evident that respondents' assessments of the research site are primarily shaped by a combination of visual uniqueness, historical value, tourism activities, and the resulting emotional experiences. These findings align with place identity theory, which emphasizes that place identity is formed through distinctive characteristics perceived and experienced as unique, distinct, and meaningful.

This study utilizes the preferences of domestic tourists aged 15–30 who have visited the research site; consequently, the findings focus primarily on the perspectives of young visitors. Therefore, further research involving other stakeholder groups such as tourism operators, local communities, and local government is required to gain a more comprehensive understanding of identity formation within Makassar's heritage tourism areas.

Therefore, stakeholders can utilize the findings regarding this distinctiveness as a basis for formulating strategies for the preservation, development, and promotion of tourism and heritage areas in Makassar. By safeguarding the unique elements, distinctive characteristics, and tourism experiences associated with each site, the area's identity can be continuously strengthened, serving as a key attraction for the city in the future.

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