

LIVING AMID INFRASTRUCTURE INEQUALITY: A SOCIAL PORTRAIT OF THE SCAVENGER COMMUNITY IN SAVANA SETTLEMENT, MAKASSAR CITY

HIDUP DI TENGAH KESENJANGAN INFRASTRUKTUR: POTRET SOSIAL KAMPUNG PEMULUNG SAVANA, MAKASSAR

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ABSTRAK

Ketimpangan infrastruktur di kawasan perkotaan Indonesia masih menjadi persoalan struktural yang berdampak langsung pada kelompok miskin kota. Meskipun pembangunan kota terus mengedepankan modernisasi dan estetika ruang, kelompok marjinal seperti komunitas pemulung justru tersisih dari akses terhadap layanan dasar dan hak atas ruang hidup yang layak. Penelitian ini berupaya untuk memahami bagaimana komunitas miskin kota beradaptasi dan membangun ketahanan sosial di tengah kondisi eksklusi struktural. Dengan mengkaji dinamika kehidupan sehari-hari komunitas pemulung di permukiman Savana, Kota Makassar, yang hidup dalam kondisi keterbatasan infrastruktur. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, dan dokumentasi guna mengungkap organisasi sosial, strategi bertahan hidup, serta makna ruang dalam komunitas tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunitas pemulung mengembangkan strategi adaptif berbasis solidaritas sosial,

jaringan ekonomi informal, dan kerja kolektif. Ketiadaan infrastruktur justru memperkuat kesadaran kolektif dan rasa saling memiliki, membentuk ketahanan sosial yang khas dan berbasis pengalaman bersama. Selain itu, ruang Savana berfungsi tidak hanya secara fungsional, tetapi juga simbolik, membentuk identitas sosial yang membedakan mereka dari warga kota formal.

ABSTRACT

Infrastructure inequality in Indonesia's urban areas remains a structural issue that directly affects the urban poor. While city development continues to emphasize modernization and spatial aesthetics, marginalized groups, such as waste-picker communities, are excluded from accessing basic services and the right to adequate living space. This study aims to understand how urban poor communities adapt and build social resilience in the face of structural exclusion. By examining the everyday life dynamics of the waste-picker community in Savana Settlement, Makassar City, who live under conditions of severe infrastructural deprivation, this research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation to uncover the forms of social organization, survival strategies, and the meanings of space within the community. The findings reveal that the waste-picker community develops adaptive strategies grounded in social solidarity, informal economic networks, and collective labor. The absence of adequate infrastructure paradoxically reinforces collective awareness and a sense of belonging, shaping a distinctive form of social resilience built upon shared experiences. Furthermore, the Savana space functions not only as a physical setting

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but also as a symbolic domain that shapes their social identity, distinguishing them from residents of formal urban areas

INTRODUCTION

The Savana Scavenger Village in Makassar City is a concrete representation of urban life that exists amid inequality and limited infrastructure. This area, located on the outskirts of the city, developed as a living space for marginalized groups that relied on scavenging and recycling for their livelihood. Life in the Savana reveals the paradox of the modern city. On the one hand, it reflects development progress, but on the other, it exposes the social reality in which some residents live in conditions of extreme deprivation. Amidst urban development expansion oriented towards economic growth, the Savana has become a forgotten space in the map of public policy and urban planning (Kusno, 2013).

Kampung Savana is one of the slums in Makassar City. Similar settlements can be found in both the city center and suburban areas, accommodating the urban poor (Jusmawandi, 2022). Geographically, Kampung Savana is located on the border between Makassar City and Gowa Regency, inhabited by around 60 families, most of whom occupy land owned by others. This settlement was formed by a wave of migrants from outside the region who came to Makassar in search of livelihoods but were unable to find decent jobs, leaving them trapped in a situation where they could not afford adequate housing (Ahmad et al., 2025; Saleh, 2024). As a community that depends on waste collection and recycling activities, Savana residents face various limitations in their daily lives: lack of access to clean water, poor sanitation systems, lack of health facilities, unhealthy environments due to piles of garbage, and limited educational infrastructure and transportation access, which exacerbate their socio-economic conditions. These conditions reflect the real form of urban marginality as described by (Wacquant, 2008), in which the urban poor are placed in social and geographical spaces that are isolated from the formal urban system.

Infrastructure gaps in urban areas reflect the structural inequalities inherent in the modern urban development process. (Harvey, 2012) refers to this phenomenon as a spatial fix, a capitalist strategy that regulates urban space to support capital accumulation at the expense of marginalized groups. Cities are not merely physical spaces, but arenas for the production and reproduction of social inequality (Lefebvre, 1991). The existence of scavenger villages, such as Savana, demonstrates how the living spaces of the urban poor are situated outside the logic of formal development, rendering them vulnerable to an exclusive and non-participatory development structure.

Infrastructure gaps have long been recognized as a manifestation of social injustice in urban spaces. A study by (Nicoletti et al., 2023; Pandey et al., 2022) reveals that informal settlements in Africa suffer from systemic infrastructure deficits compared to formal areas, suggesting that infrastructure is not only a technical aspect but also a political form of space that perpetuates inequality. In Indonesia, (Roitman et al., 2024; Telaumbanua et al., 2024) assert that infrastructure plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and enhancing housing quality. However, their research is cross-sectional and therefore unable to reveal long-term causal relationships. Thus, differences in infrastructure access are a key indicator of spatial exclusion inherent in urban social classes.

Other studies show that infrastructure inequality is often closely related to informal practices and urban policies that are ambivalent towards the urban poor. A study (Baye, 2025) found in Ethiopia that conflicts between formal policies and local practices widen the

disparity in access to basic services. Meanwhile, (Yiftachel, 2009, 2015) identified that modern planning regimes fail to accommodate gray spaces, which are informal areas with ambiguous legality that are easily excluded from formal urban systems. Both studies highlight how spatial exclusion results from policy logic that is insensitive to local social practices. From the perspective of urban informality, (García et al., 2024) demonstrate that the relationship between housing informality and the subformal economy exhibits a distinctive spatial pattern in Medellín, which reinforces marginalization. Meanwhile, (Hosseini et al., 2023) find that urban informality is multidimensional, touching on intertwined social, economic, and environmental aspects. A similar view is expressed by (Geyer et al., 2013), who assert that the role of informal communities in the urban economy is often overlooked, despite their significant contributions to urban sustainability. These studies emphasize that marginalized settlers, such as scavengers, are important social agents, despite their weak position in the structure.

However, most of these studies focus on the macro level and rarely touch on the microdynamics of highly marginalized communities such as scavengers in eastern Indonesian cities. Cross-sectional studies fail to capture the temporal dimensions and adaptive strategies of residents in response to infrastructure deficits. Additionally, the local power dynamics between marginalized residents, officials, and city policymakers remain underexplored. Based on these arguments, this study provides an opportunity to understand how infrastructure, power, and social strategies interact concretely in the context of scavenger communities in Indonesian cities. Thus, this study departs from the need to explain how the Savana scavenger community in Makassar lives amid infrastructure gaps, and how their social strategies and solidarity networks function as mechanisms of adaptation and resistance to structural urban injustice. This research not only fills an empirical gap regarding marginalized communities in Eastern Indonesia but also contributes theoretically to expanding the discourse on spatial exclusion, informality, and infrastructure justice in the context of developing countries.

METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is the scavenger community living in Kampung Savana, Tamalanrea District, Makassar City. This community was chosen because it represents a marginalized group living with limited access to basic infrastructure, including clean water, sanitation, and education. The focus of the analysis is on social dynamics, survival strategies, and the relationship between infrastructure conditions and the socio-economic structure formed within the community. This study employs a descriptive, qualitative design with an ethnographic approach, which enables researchers to understand the meanings and social practices that emerge in the daily lives of scavengers in Kampung Savana. The ethnographic approach also emphasizes the direct involvement of researchers in the field to gain a deep understanding of the social context of marginalized communities (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with members of the scavenger community, community leaders, and village officials. Secondary data was obtained from Makassar city government reports, academic articles related to urban poverty, and policy documents on slum management. Data collection techniques were carried out using three primary methods: (1) participatory observation, to understand the daily lives of scavengers and their

environmental conditions; (2) in-depth interviews, to explore subjective experiences and survival strategies; and (3) documentation, including photographs, location maps, and field notes. The data collection process involved regular field visits to build trust with residents and obtain authentic data (Emerson et al., 2011). Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006)


RESULT




Living in Poverty

The study's results show that the residents of Kampung Pemulung Savana continue to face various limitations in basic infrastructure. Most residents rely on dug wells as their primary source of clean water; however, the water is often yellow and unfit for daily use. As a result, residents are forced to buy water from the nearest housing complex for Rp2,000 per three gallons of PDAM water, which is an additional burden for low-income families. In terms of sanitation, some residents have private toilets, but many still defecate in the swamps around the village. During the rainy season, existing sanitation facilities are often unusable due to flooding in residential areas. This condition increases the risk of environment-based diseases.

Access to electricity is also not yet fully stable. Although most houses are connected to the PLN network, some residents still rely on electricity connections from neighbors with a payment system of around Rp100,000 per month, which often causes technical and safety problems. In terms of road access and transportation, although the main road to the village has been paved, the roads within the residential area remain potholed and muddy when it rains, and sometimes even flooded to a height of half an adult's height. In their daily activities, some residents use motorcycles and carts for work and to meet their basic needs, while public transportation is almost non-existent. The following table illustrates the types of infrastructure limitations faced by residents in terms of access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, and road access and transportation. This data was obtained through direct observation in the field and visual documentation representing the actual conditions of the scavenger village.

Table 1. The limited infrastructure available to communities in the savanna villages

No	Picture	Description	Source
1		Shows the general condition of the residential environment, semi-permanent houses, and garbage accumulation that is part of the residents' economic activities.	Research Documentation

2		Dug wells are the main source of water for residents, but the water is yellow and unfit for consumption, so residents buy water from the local water company (PDAM) in the surrounding housing complexes.	Research Documentation
3		Shows the general condition of the residential environment, including semi-permanent houses and garbage accumulation, which is a common aspect of residents' economic activities.	Research Documentation
4		Dug wells are the primary source of water for residents; however, the water is often yellow and unfit for consumption. Consequently, residents purchase water from the local water company (PDAM) in the surrounding housing complexes.	Research Documentation

Source: Research Documentation (2025)

The above conditions clearly illustrate that the residents of Kampung Pemulung Savana live with severe and systemic infrastructure limitations. These limitations not only affect their quality of life, but also widen the social gap between the urban poor and other, more prosperous urban communities. Limited access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, and transportation is not merely a technical problem, but part of a structural inequality that places Savana residents outside the scope of urban development policies. They live in a situation that forces them to adapt to marginalization, demonstrating how poverty and social exclusion operate through the unequal distribution of public services in urban areas.

The infrastructure inequality in Kampung Savana does not exist in isolation. However, it is rooted in a city development process that prioritizes growth and spatial aesthetics, while marginalizing the city's poor from this planning. The Savana area has become an

administratively underserved “gray zone,” making it vulnerable to eviction and neglect by public policy. The uncertainty of land status discourages residents from improving the physical condition of their homes and environment, perpetuating a cycle of intergenerational poverty. In this context, infrastructure limitations are not merely technical problems, but also a reflection of power relations in urban governance, where access to livable space is a privilege for certain groups, while scavengers remain confined to marginal spaces on the city’s outskirts.

Social Solidarity and Survival Strategies.




Field observations and interviews reveal that social solidarity in Kampung Pemulung Savana remains a crucial foundation for the community’s survival. Despite living in poverty, they have built strong social relationships through mutual assistance and sharing of resources. The majority of residents work as scavengers and construction workers, earning an average weekly income of around IDR 200,000. Limited income makes it difficult for them to repair their homes or meet other basic needs. Most houses are constructed from recycled materials, including wood and bamboo. Because the land they occupy is disputed, residents only make necessary repairs, such as patching leaky roofs with whatever materials are available.

In such economic conditions, solidarity becomes the primary mechanism for survival. When one family lacks the money to buy water, other neighbors often help selflessly. Mutual assistance is also a common practice, whether it involves repairing homes, helping families in need, or addressing urgent needs. During floods or fires, residents spontaneously help each other without waiting for government assistance. They rarely receive formal assistance from the State. The main road to the village has been paved, but the project was undertaken by a private entity, not the government. Aid programs such as basic food supplies or other social support have not reached the majority of residents.

Even so, several community groups, including students, environmental organizations, and social groups, have distributed aid to Kampung Savana. However, some residents have been disappointed because they were promised aid after being photographed by outside parties, but the promise was never realized. In terms of health, residents face poor environmental conditions because their work as scavengers makes them vulnerable to skin diseases caused by unclean water. Access to health centers is now better thanks to improvements to the main road, but residents in the back of the village still experience difficulties due to potholes and flooded roads.

In the field of education, almost all kindergarten and elementary school children attend the Smart Home Foundation’s Impian Islamic Kindergarten and Elementary School, which does not charge tuition fees. The existence of this school is a great hope for low-income families, allowing their children to continue receiving an education. However, access to the school is often difficult due to potholed and muddy roads, especially during the rainy season. For middle school-aged children, many end up dropping out of school and working as scavengers or construction workers to help support their families. The following documentation provides concrete examples of these solidarity and social adaptation practices.

Table 2. Survival Strategies of the Savana Scavenger Village Residents

No	Picture	Description	Source
1		Residents are seen sorting waste in the form of used bottles. This activity is the community's primary source of livelihood.	Research Documentation
2		Children from scavenger families at a learning center in the Savannah village remain enthusiastic about attending school despite their limited resources.	Research Documentation
3		Simple houses are built using wood, bamboo, and zinc. Repairs are carried out collectively by residents, especially when roofs or walls are damaged.	Research Documentation

Source: Research Documentation (2025)

This data confirms that the lives of the residents of Kampung Pemulung Savana depend not only on minimal economic income but also on the strength of social solidarity. The lack of structural support from the State has encouraged them to build a social system based on trust, mutual assistance, and reciprocity. In a situation of extreme poverty and uncertainty regarding land ownership, solidarity has become an important instrument for securing their collective survival.

The phenomenon of social solidarity in Kampung Pemulung Savana shows that despite economic limitations and minimal government support, residents are still able to build strong social networks. They help each other in meeting basic needs, repairing houses, and maintaining environmental cleanliness. The practice of mutual assistance is also evident when a resident is sick or experiencing economic hardship, with neighbors providing help in the form of labor or food. Mutual assistance has become a familiar pattern in daily life, not only as a means of survival, but also as a manifestation of a sense of belonging to their community. This solidarity demonstrates that the lives of Kampung Savana residents are not only limited by material constraints but also shaped by the social strength that arises from shared experiences in overcoming difficulties. Through collective work and mutual

trust, they have managed to establish a relatively stable social life despite limited infrastructure and economic conditions.

DISCUSSION

Research indicates that residents of Kampung Savana continue to face challenges with limited access to basic infrastructure, including clean water, sanitation, electricity, and road connectivity. This inequality is not solely due to economic backwardness. However, it is also related to the village's status, which is located in an informal area and is not administratively recognized. However, despite these limitations, strong social solidarity has grown. Residents help one another meet basic needs, repair homes, and assist neighbors in need. This solidarity serves as a social mechanism for sustaining livelihoods and building a collective identity amid marginal conditions.

Kampung Savana is a clear example of marginal spaces in urban areas that are created when development processes push poor communities away from economic growth centers. In the context of urban planning that focuses on aesthetics and investment, areas like Savana are often considered "unsuitable" and excluded from official development plans. This puts waste pickers in a situation of social and economic uncertainty. The unclear status of the land and the absence of public services keep them trapped in a cycle of structural poverty. However, Savana is also a unique social space where mutual aid and forms of solidarity that are not found in formal urban communities have developed.

This phenomenon demonstrates that urban poverty cannot be solely interpreted as material deprivation, but also as a consequence of exclusive power structures and spatial policies. The limited infrastructure in Savana is a manifestation of how the State and the market shape power relations over urban space. Amidst this inequality, Savana residents negotiate limitations through solidarity-based social practices and moral economics. Practices such as mutual assistance and togetherness are not merely cultural values, but survival strategies born out of the structural experience of poverty.

The lives of Kampung Savana residents reflect two intertwined dimensions: structural vulnerability resulting from exclusion from urban spaces and social strength rooted in community solidarity. The process of urban development, oriented towards growth and aesthetics, has pushed low-income groups to marginal areas without adequate infrastructure services (Salim et al., 2018). However, amid this marginalization, Savana residents display a form of resilience from below (Szpakowska-Loranc & Matusik, 2020) through practices of mutual assistance, mutual support, and moral solidarity. This practice aligns with (Bayat, 2013) concept of the quiet encroachment of the ordinary, in which the urban poor gradually reclaim living space and create alternative social orders outside the State's and market's logic. Solidarity is not merely a survival strategy, but also an expression of everyday politics that demonstrates citizens' agency in the face of the State's absence.

Compared to other urban poor communities, such as Kampung Aquarium in Jakarta, which have formal advocacy support (Padawangi, 2022; Padawangi & Douglass, 2015), the pattern of solidarity in Savana is more socio-culturally rooted in the local moral economy. This difference shows that the forms of resistance among the urban poor in Indonesia are not singular, but contextual and dependent on the available socio-political structures. Thus, these findings enrich the study of urban poverty in Indonesia by demonstrating that resilience and solidarity can be forms of non-confrontational resistance to structural injustice resulting from exclusive spatial governance (Roy, 2011).

Based on these findings, a more inclusive and socially equitable approach to urban development is needed. City governments need to review their spatial policies to ensure that they do not exclude low-income groups from access to livable spaces. Appropriate interventions should not only involve the provision of physical infrastructure, but also the strengthening of social capacity through the recognition of communities such as Savana as legitimate members of the city. Community-based empowerment programs, improved access to clean water and sanitation, and land legalization can be the first steps toward more equitable social integration. On the other hand, maintaining internal solidarity among residents is crucial as a form of social capital, enabling them to fight for their rights collectively.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that life in Kampung Pemulung Savana embodies the paradox of uneven urban development: on the one hand, the city presents a modern and aesthetically pleasing face, but on the other hand, it still leaves spaces of exclusion for the urban poor. Limitations in basic infrastructure, such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity, are not merely technical problems but manifestations of power relations in spatial governance that marginalize scavengers and exclude them from public services. These conditions demonstrate that urban poverty is not only driven by economic factors, but also by development policies that fail to ensure citizens' fundamental right to adequate living space.

Despite living in limited circumstances, the residents of Kampung Savana demonstrate social strength rooted in solidarity and collective work. Practices of mutual assistance, helping one another, and a sense of togetherness become survival mechanisms that maintain social cohesion amid economic uncertainty and spatial status. This solidarity not only functions as an adaptive strategy but also as a subtle form of social resistance against structural inequality. Therefore, local governments and policymakers need to shift their development approach from a technocratic one to a participatory and socially just one, so that urban spaces can be accessed equally by all levels of society.

This study has limitations in its scope, as it focuses solely on one community of scavengers in Makassar City; therefore, the results cannot be widely generalized. Additionally, the relatively short research period means that these findings provide only a snapshot of the situation. Future research is expected to expand the location and deepen the dimensions of public policy in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of poverty and marginality in urban areas.

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