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The Suitability of Mixed Methodology in Reading the Identity of Ternate City

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ABSTRACT

Urban identity is a multidimensional concept shaped not only by physical elements but also by historical, cultural, spatial, and perceptual dimensions. As a historic city, Ternate possesses a layered identity formed through the interaction of Sultanate heritage, colonial fortifications, coastal morphology, Mount Gamalama, historic street networks, and community cultural practices. Although previous studies have examined various aspects of urban identity, most focus on empirical findings, while limited attention has been given to evaluating the methodological suitability of mixed methods for investigating urban identity in historic cities. This study aims to examine the suitability of the mixed methods approach for reading the urban identity of Ternate. The research employs a descriptive qualitative methodological review based on document analysis and a state-of-the-art literature review. The analysis assesses the relationship between the characteristics of Ternate's urban identity, research data requirements, methodological design, and strategies for integrating qualitative and quantitative data. The findings indicate that mixed methods is an appropriate approach because qualitative data can reveal historical narratives, symbolic meanings, cultural values, and spatial structures, whereas quantitative data can measure public perceptions of urban identity elements. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on explicit data integration, well-defined indicators, and the use of joint displays to synthesize findings from both datasets. This study concludes that mixed methods provide a comprehensive methodological framework for understanding the complex urban identity of Ternate and contributes to strengthening methodological discourse on urban identity research in historic cities characterized by intertwined tangible and intangible heritage.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Urban identity is a crucial issue in urban studies because it demonstrates the distinctive character that distinguishes one city from another. Urban identity is not only formed by physical elements such as buildings, roads, open spaces, landmarks, and regional patterns. Urban identity is also shaped by history, culture, social values, collective memory, spatial experiences, and public perceptions. The concept of urban identity also develops as a relationship between the city's identity itself (identity of urban), the identity formed within the urban space (identity in urban), and the identity constructed through the urban planning process (identity for urban). Therefore, understanding identity requires a multidimensional approach (Umar et al., 2024). City identity needs to be understood through a comprehensive approach because it encompasses physical, social, cultural, historical, and spatial dimensions. Therefore, understanding city identity requires a methodology capable of connecting physical, social, historical, and perceptual data in an integrated manner (Mansour et al., 2023).

This methodological need becomes even more crucial when the object of study is a historic city. Historic cities not only retain physical traces of the past but also contain layers of meaning, symbols, changes in spatial function, and social memories of the community. The Historic Urban Landscape approach views cities as layered landscapes containing relationships between cultural heritage, nature, spatial structures, social values, and community experiences. This perspective demonstrates that historic cities cannot be read simply through an inventory of buildings or physical objects. Historic cities need to be read as spatial systems that connect tangible and intangible elements (Taylor, 2018).

Ternate City is a city with a multi-layered identity. Its identity is shaped by the interconnectedness of the Sultanate's history, colonial influences, coastal spatial structures, Mount Gamalama, road networks, palace areas, mosques, forts, town squares, and community cultural spaces. Ternate's Islamic urban planning is closely linked to local morphology and cosmology, particularly in the relationships between the palaces, mosques, mountains, sea, and the city's spatial structure (Handoko, 2015). The morphology of Ternate City's center developed linearly following Mount Gamalama, combined with a radial pattern. These findings demonstrate that Ternate City's identity cannot be understood solely as a matter of physical form, but also as a result of the relationship between history, nature, space, and culture (Sinaga et al., 2017).

Previous studies on Ternate also show the existence of layers of identity originating from the Sultanate's cultural space and colonial heritage. The spatial characteristics of the Ternate Sultanate's cultural area show that this area has a core space in the Sultanate's palace as well as an outer space related to traditional activities and cultural structures (Musa, 2018). The colonial forts in Ternate, particularly Fort Oranje and Fort Kastela, serve not only as physical relics but also as objects of memory, nostalgia, tourism, and contemporary identity formation. These findings suggest that Ternate's identity is shaped by the intersection of the Sultanate's heritage, colonialism, natural spaces, and social practices (Lukito et al., 2025).

In the development of urban identity studies, several studies have shown the importance of integration between physical data, public perceptions, and social context. Koyoo & Breed (2023) used a mixed methods approach to examine the landscape identity of Kisumu City, Kenya, in the context of urban renewal. The research showed that the city's landscape identity is formed through the relationship between physical elements, community experiences, memory, and spatial change. Fanzini et al. (2024) also used surveys, field observations, GIS, and the Historic Urban Landscape approach to interpret historic public spaces in the Ancient Canal of Yangzhou. Both studies demonstrate that the study of urban identity and historic

spaces requires an integration of quantitative and qualitative data so that spatial readings are not only descriptive but also able to capture public perceptions and experiences.

Mixed methods become relevant in this context because this approach combines the strengths of qualitative and quantitative data in one research design. Johnson et al. (2007) explains that mixed methods is an approach that combines qualitative and quantitative elements to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem. In urban identity studies, qualitative data can be used to understand history, symbolic meaning, spatial structure, cultural activities, and social values. Meanwhile, quantitative data can be used to more measurably understand patterns of public perception. Therefore, mixed methods has the potential to be an appropriate methodology for understanding the complex and layered nature of urban identity.

However, the state of the art shows that most previous research has primarily applied specific methods to interpret city identity, urban landscapes, or historic urban spaces. These studies generally focus on empirical findings regarding the elements that shape urban identity. There are still limited studies that specifically examine the suitability of mixed methods methodology as a tool for interpreting city identity, especially in historic cities with layers of sultanate, colonial, natural, cultural, and public perception, such as Ternate City. Mansour et al. (2023) also emphasized that the study of urban identity still requires a more systematic and comprehensive methodological approach to assess urban identity more holistically.

The scientific novelty of this article lies in its focus. This article not only discusses the identity of Ternate City as the object of study, but also places mixed methods methodology as the primary focus, assessing its suitability. In other words, this article offers a methodological review to determine whether mixed methods are capable of interpreting the identity of Ternate City, which is formed from physical elements, history, culture, natural spaces, the legacy of the Sultanate, colonial heritage, and public perception. This novelty is important because interpreting a city's identity requires more than just selecting a method; it also requires assessing the relationship between the object's characteristics, data requirements, the type of approach, and how the analysis results are integrated.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem in this article is the suitability of mixed methods methodology in understanding the identity of Ternate City. This problem arises because the identity of Ternate City is complex, while each approach has limitations. Qualitative approaches are strong in understanding meaning, history, and cultural context, but are less able to show measurable trends in public perception. Quantitative approaches are strong in showing patterns of perception, but less able to explain the historical and symbolic meaning behind the numerical data. Therefore, this article starts with the main question: to what extent is mixed methods appropriate for understanding the identity of Ternate City as a city layered with history, space, culture, and public perception?

Based on these issues, this article aims to examine the suitability of mixed methods methodology in understanding the identity of Ternate City. The study focuses on the ability of mixed methods to connect qualitative and quantitative data, understand the relationship between physical and non-physical elements, and explain city identity as the result of the interaction between space, history, culture, and public perception. This article is expected to contribute to strengthening the methodology of urban identity research, especially for historic cities with layered characteristics such as Ternate City.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This article employs a methodological review approach with a descriptive qualitative research approach based on document analysis and a review of previous literature. This methodological review was chosen because this article does not aim to generate new field data, but rather to assess the suitability of mixed methods as a research design for understanding the identity of Ternate City. The object of analysis is a methodological design for urban identity research that positions Ternate City as a city with layers of history, culture, natural spaces, and public perception.

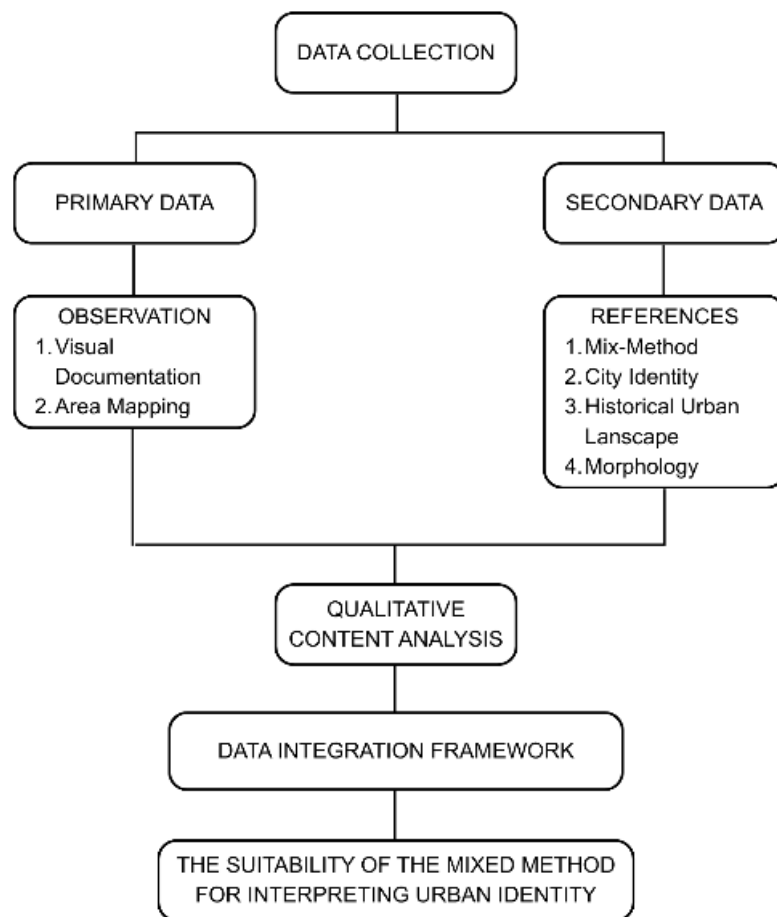


Figure 1. Research Stages Graph
(Source: Author, 2026)

The data sources for this article consist of primary data in the form of visual field documentation and area mapping to understand the character of Ternate city identity and secondary data in the form of mixed methods methodology literature, city identity studies, Historic Urban Landscape studies, morphology and cosmology studies of Ternate City, spatial studies of the Ternate Sultanate area, and studies of colonial fort heritage in Ternate. The literature was selected purposively based on relevance to three main keywords, namely mixed methods, city identity, and Ternate City. The sources used include scientific journal articles, methodology books, urban design theory books, and conceptual documents on historic urban landscapes.

The analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis techniques. The analysis phase included identifying key concepts, grouping literature findings, assessing the suitability between object characteristics and data needs, and constructing a matrix of relationships between city identity components and methodological approaches (Guetterman et al., 2015).

In mixed methods research, data integration strategy is a key component that determines the quality of interpretation of research results because both types of data must complement each other to comprehensively answer research questions (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). The suitability assessment criteria include four aspects, namely the ability of the method to read physical elements, the ability of the method to read historical and cultural meanings, the ability of the method to read public perceptions, and the ability of the mixed methods method which emphasizes the integration of data at the design, method, interpretation, and reporting levels (Fetters et al., 2013).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Characteristics of Ternate City Identity and Methodological Implications

The results have shown that the character of Ternate City's identity has strong methodological implications. Ternate City cannot be read solely as a physical space, as its identity is shaped through layers of history, urban form, cultural space, local cosmology, and community experience. Handoko (2015) shows that the morphology and cosmology of Ternate City are related to the relationship between the palace, mosque, mountains, sea, and spatial structure Sinaga et al. (2017). He added that the morphological pattern of Ternate City Center developed linearly, following Mount Gamalama, combined with a radial pattern. These two findings suggest that Ternate's identity operates through the relationship between natural elements and built space.

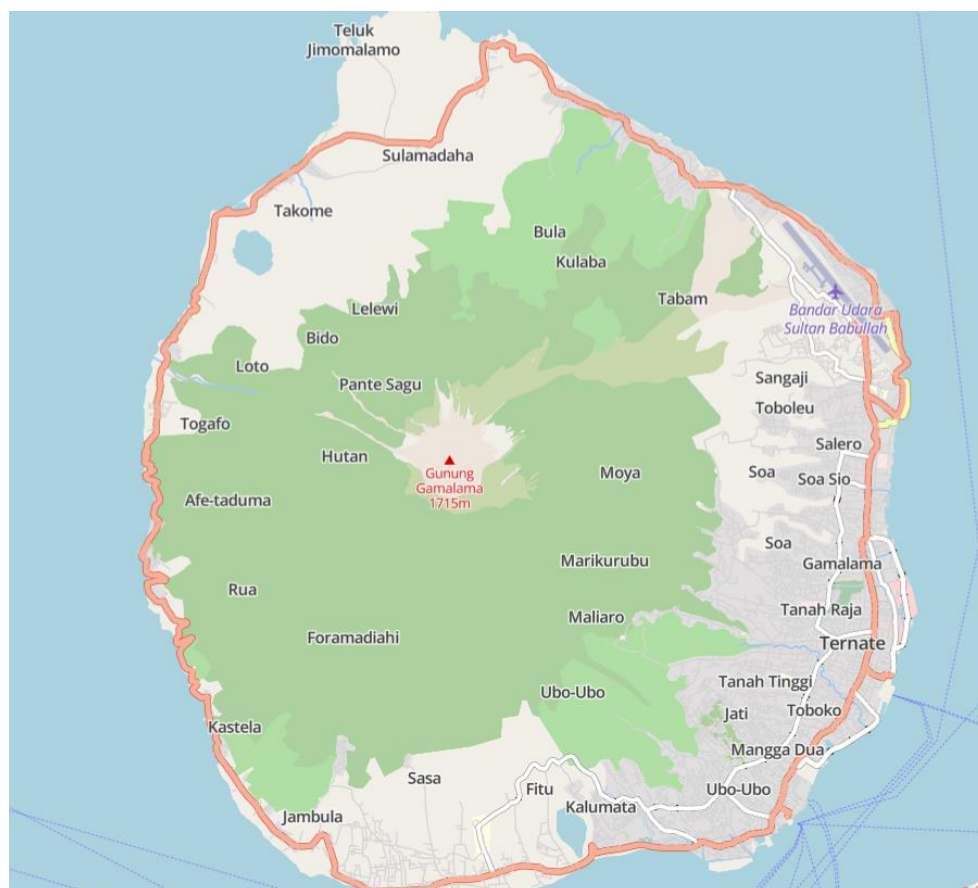


Figure 2. Map of Ternate Island
(Source: openstreetmap.org, 2026)

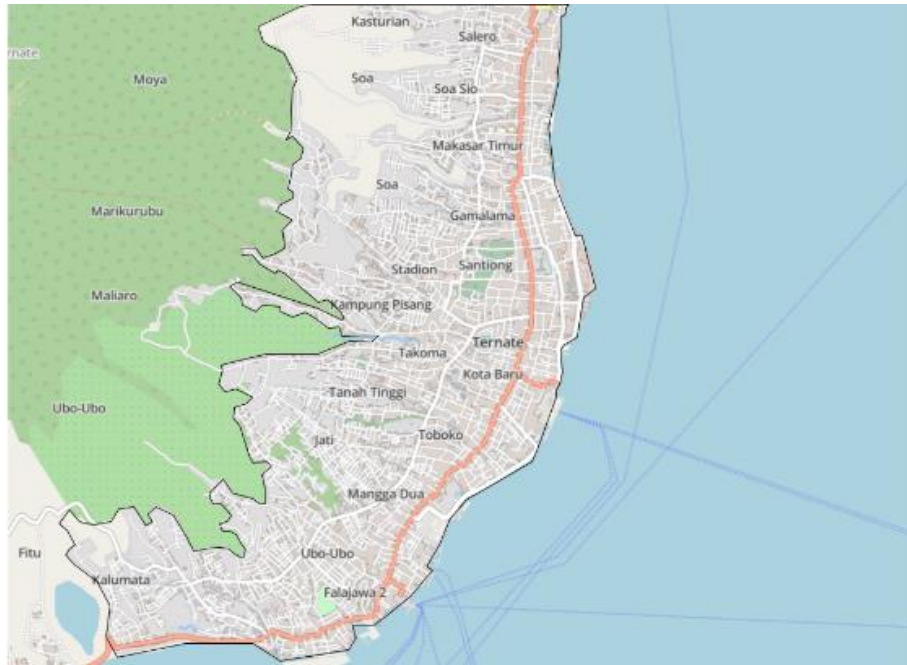


Figure 3. Map of Ternate City Center
(Source: openstreetmap.org, 2026)

On the other hand, Moses (2018) shows that the cultural area of the Ternate Sultanate has a core space and an outer space related to traditional functions. This study confirms that the Sultanate's space not only contains buildings, but also contains rules, paths, boundaries, and cultural practices. Meanwhile, the findings indicate that heritage space is not only understood as a physical legacy, but also as a medium for forming collective identity through the relationship between cultural values, memories, and community experiences with the urban environment (Cercleux et al., 2022). Lukito et al. (2025) demonstrates that the legacy of the colonial fort in Ternate is also part of the city's contemporary identity, as it is linked to memory, nostalgia, tourism, and historical narrative. Thus, Ternate's identity has two main layers that must be read simultaneously: the Sultanate and the colonial layers.



Figure 4. Palace of the Sultanate of Ternate
(Source: Personal Documentation, 2026)



Figure 5. Fort Orange, a colonial legacy
(Source: Personal Documentation, 2026)



Figure 6. Traditional Activities of the Ternate Sultanate
(Source: Personal Documentation, 2026)

The methodological implication of this characteristic is the need for a research design that relies beyond physical observation. If research relies solely on observation, social meanings, societal perceptions, and collective memory risk being overlooked. If research relies solely on surveys, spatial structures, history, and symbolic values risk being superficially understood. Therefore, mixed methods are initially appropriate because they can combine qualitative and quantitative readings within a single design.

Table 1. State of the Art of Urban Identity and Mixed Methods Studies

Writer	Focus of Study	Method	Contribution to Articles
Mansour et al. (2023)	City identity assessment	Methodological study	Emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to reading urban identity.
Koyoo and Breed (2023)	Urban landscape identity	Mixed methods	Demonstrates the relationship between physical elements, memory, and people's perceptions.
Fanzini et al. (2024)	Historic public spaces	Survey, observation, GIS, HUL	Demonstrates the importance of integrating perceptual data and spatial data.
Handoko (2015)	Morphology and cosmology of Ternate	Archaeological and historical analysis	Explaining the relationship between palaces, mosques, mountains, seas, and spatial structures.
Lukito et al. (2025)	The legacy of Ternate fort	Qualitative	Showing the fort as memory, nostalgia, tourism, and city identity.

Source: Author's Analysis 2026

4.2. Suitability of Mixed Methods to City Identity Data Needs

The suitability of mixed methods in interpreting Ternate City's identity can be seen in its dual data requirements. The city's identity requires both objective data about spatial elements and subjective data about how the public recognizes those spaces. Johnson et al. (2007) states that mixed methods are relevant when a single type of data is insufficient to explain a research problem. In the context of Ternate, the issue of identity not only asks what elements make up the city, but also how those elements are understood, remembered, and valued by the community.

Qualitative data can be used to understand the history of the Sultanate, colonial legacy, spatial cosmology, symbolic meaning, traditional functions, and changes in spatial use. This data is important because city identity is related to meaning and context. Quantitative data

can be used to understand trends in public perception, such as the level of familiarity with palaces, mosques, forts, town squares, gates, piers, or historical road networks. This data is important because city identity is not only determined by researchers but also shaped by community experiences.

Thus, mixed methods are appropriate because they can combine two types of reading. A qualitative approach answers the question of why certain elements are important, while a quantitative approach addresses the extent to which those elements are recognized or valued by the public. The combination of the two makes the reading of Ternate City's identity more robust than a single approach.

Table 2. Mixed Methods Suitability Matrix in Reading the Identity of Ternate City

City Identity Components	Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data	Integration Function
Physical elements of the city	Observation, maps, documentation, archives	Element recognition score by the community	Linking physical conditions to public readability
Sultanate and colonial history	Historical literature, archives, interviews	Perception of historical value	Explain the relationship between history and societal judgment
Symbolic and cultural meaning	Cultural narratives, customary practices, interpretation of space	Perception of meaning and pride	Connecting cultural values with citizen experiences
Spatial structure and morphology	Spatial analysis, road network, activity center	Perceived ease of orientation	Testing the relationship between spatial structure and city image
Continuity of identity	Preservation conditions, changes in spatial function	Assessment of conservation urgency	Assessing the strength of identity based on conditions and perceptions

Source: Author's Analysis 2026

4.3. Data Integration as a Primary Requirement for Methodological Suitability

Mixed methods isn't simply understood as the use of two types of data in a single study. The essence of mixed methods lies in integration. Feters et al. (2013) explains that integration can be done at the design, method, interpretation, and reporting levels. O'Cathain et al. (2010) also emphasized that combining qualitative and quantitative data should yield new insights, not simply present two separate results. Thus, the suitability of mixed methods in interpreting the identity of Ternate City depends heavily on how the data is combined. The development of mixed methods today is no longer seen simply as a combination of methods, but as an integrative approach that yields deeper understanding through various analytical perspectives (Mertens et al., 2024).

In the context of Ternate City, integration can be done through joint displays. Guetterman et al. (2015) explains that joint displays help present qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously so researchers can draw meta-inferences. In urban identity studies, joint displays can include columns on city elements, physical conditions, historical meaning, public perceptions, and interpretations of identity. For example, if a palace receives the highest

recognition score in a survey, this result needs to be explained through historical data, spatial position, cultural function, and symbolic meaning. If a colonial fort is more familiar to tourists than elements of the Sultanate, these quantitative findings need to be linked to historical narratives, tourism policies, and representations of urban space.

This kind of integration allows mixed methods to go beyond description. It can yield more robust explanations of the relationship between physical elements and public perception. In understanding the identity of Ternate City, integration is also useful for assessing whether historically significant elements still retain social relevance in today's society.

4.4. The Relationship of Mixed Methods with the Image of the City Framework, Urban Design Element, and HUL

The suitability of mixed methods can also be seen from its ability to support the use of several theoretical frameworks. The Image of the City theory from Lynch (1960) can help interpret the legibility of a city through paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. In the context of Ternate, this theory can be used to interpret historical road networks, natural mountain and sea boundaries, the Sultanate area, town squares, mosques, palaces, and forts. However, Lynch's theory is more robust in interpreting imagery and spatial orientation, so it needs to be complemented by other frameworks to assess the physical quality and function of space.

Urban design elements of Shirvani (1985) can complement this reading through land use, circulation, open space, pedestrian ways, building form and massing, activity support, signage, and preservation. This framework helps explain whether elements of a city's identity are still functional, accessible, legible, and maintained. Meanwhile, the Historic Urban Landscape approach positions a historic city as a landscape that has layers of natural, cultural, social, economic, visual, and spatial experiences (Taylor, 2018; UNESCO, 2011). The Historic Urban Landscape approach has developed as a framework that integrates cultural heritage, ecological systems, social dynamics, and sustainable urban development processes (Bandarin & van Oers, 2021). The combination of these three frameworks requires a method that can simultaneously address both physical and perceptual aspects. Mixed methods fulfill this need by incorporating both qualitative spatial analysis and measurement of public perception.

Thus, the suitability of mixed methods lies not only in the integration of data but also in its ability to serve as a vehicle for theoretical integration. This method can connect Lynch's approach to urban image, Shirvani's approach to urban design quality, and HUL's approach to historical layers and cultural meaning.

4.5. Limitations and Strengthening of the Methodology

Although mixed methods are suitable for understanding the identity of Ternate City, they have limitations. First, mixed methods require a clear integration design. Without integration, research becomes merely a matter of using two methods side by side. Second, indicators of public perception must be formulated operationally. Indicators that are too general can make it difficult to connect quantitative data with qualitative findings. Third, respondent selection needs to be tailored to the city's character. People who live, work, and engage in activities in historic areas may have different spatial experiences.

Fourth, quantitative analysis using only descriptive statistics can address general patterns of perception, but it is insufficient to explain the relationships between variables. If the research objective is simply to examine perceptual trends, descriptive statistics are sufficient. However, if the research wishes to examine the relationship between element recognition, historical meaning, and sense of belonging, correlation analysis or simple modeling may be considered. Fifth, qualitative data must have sufficient depth to explain the context of the survey numbers.

Methodological strengthening can be achieved in three ways. First, by constructing an indicator matrix that connects Lynch's elements, Shirvani's elements, and HUL dimensions. Second, by using a joint display to combine findings from observations, interviews, documents, and questionnaires. Third, by formulating meta-inferences as the final result of data integration. In this way, mixed methods can function not only as a research design but also as a systematic tool for understanding Ternate City's identity.

Table 3. Limitations and Strengthening Strategies of Mixed Methods

Limitations	Impact on Analysis	Strengthening Strategy
Data integration is not yet explicit	Qualitative and quantitative findings can stand alone	Constructing joint displays and meta-inference
Perception indicators are too general	Survey data is difficult to relate to theory	Creating indicators based on Lynch, Shirvani, and HUL
Sampling is less detailed	Public perceptions may be less representative of spatial experiences.	Determining respondent criteria based on activity and spatial proximity
Limited quantitative analysis	Only describes general trends	Add relationship analysis if the research objectives require it.
Qualitative data is less in-depth	The historical and symbolic meaning is not strongly explained.	Strengthening interviews, archives, and document analysis

Source: Author's Analysis 2026

4.6. Key Scientific Findings

The main scientific finding of this article is that mixed methods have strong methodological suitability for reading the identity of Ternate City, but this suitability is subject to certain conditions. Mixed methods are appropriate because Ternate City's identity is shaped by elements that can be physically observed and elements that must be understood through perception, memory, and meaning. However, this method only produces a strong reading when qualitative and quantitative data are explicitly integrated.

The second finding is that mixed methods can bridge the gap between urban imagery, urban design, and historic urban landscape approaches. Urban imagery requires visual and perceptual understanding. Urban design requires understanding the physical qualities and functions of space. Urban planning requires understanding layers of history, culture, nature, and community experience. Mixed methods allow for the analysis of all three within a single framework.

The third finding is that research into the identity of a historic city like Ternate needs to avoid reducing identity to a list of physical objects. Instead, city identity must be understood as a relationship between objects, space, history, values, and societal perceptions. Therefore, research methods must be able to systematically interpret these relationships.

5. CONCLUSION

This article concludes that a mixed methods methodology is appropriate for interpreting the identity of Ternate City. This suitability arises because Ternate City's identity is complex and layered. The city's identity is shaped by the history of the Sultanate, colonial heritage, coastal areas, Mount Gamalama, spatial structures, physical elements of the city, cultural practices, collective memory, and public perceptions. This character cannot be adequately interpreted with a purely qualitative or quantitative approach.

Qualitative data plays a crucial role in explaining historical layers, symbolic meanings, spatial structures, cultural practices, and the continuity of identity. Quantitative data plays a crucial role in demonstrating trends in public perceptions of the elements that shape a city's identity. Integrating the two can yield a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between physical space and social meaning. However, mixed methods can only work optimally with clear indicators, an explicit data integration strategy, and a joint display that brings together qualitative and quantitative findings.

This article's contribution lies in its assertion that the suitability of a method for studying urban identity cannot be solely assessed by the use of two approaches, but rather by its ability to connect object characteristics, data requirements, theories, and analytical strategies. Future studies could develop an operational instrument based on the integration of Lynch, Shirvani, and the Historic Urban Landscape to empirically test the reading of Ternate City's identity.

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