
THE MEANING AND VALUES OF PAHANGGA AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE IDENTITY AND IMAGE OF GORONTALO CITY

Dara Fitriani

Department of Architecture and Engineering
Faculty of Engineering
Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
darafitriani110394@ung.ac.id

Asta Juliarmann Hatta

Department of Architecture Engineering
Faculty of Engineering
Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
astajuliarmannhatta@ung.ac.id

Nurnaningsih Nico Abdul

Department of Architecture Engineering
Faculty of Engineering
Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
nurnaningsihabdul@ung.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Gorontalo, a city rich in history and culture, has many elements of traditional architecture that serve as symbols of the identity and cultural heritage of its people. One important element in Gorontalo's traditional architecture is the Pahangga. Although previous research has discussed Gorontalo's traditional architecture, limited studies have explored how Pahangga can be adapted in contemporary architecture while preserving its symbolic meaning. This study aims to explore the meaning and value of Pahangga as a representation of the identity and image of Gorontalo City. Pahangga, which is an ornament of Gorontalo culture, has a deep history and meaning in local culture. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with a semiotic approach, which analyzes signs and symbols to explore the philosophical meaning and cultural values contained in the Pahangga elements. The results of the study show that Pahangga has been used as a decorative element in various public buildings, such as school gates, city parks, and boundary gates. Pahangga not only has a symbolic meaning related to social hierarchy and cultural values, but also plays a role in shaping the identity and visual image of the city. This study concludes that Pahangga has great potential to be strengthened as an element that forms the identity and image of Gorontalo City through wider application to urban elements such as pedestrian paths and landmarks. Thus, the contributions and practical implications are expected to be a guide for city planners such as architects, urban planners, and parties involved in adopting local cultural elements as part of efforts to create inclusive, iconic, and culturally meaningful public spaces amidst city modernization.

KEYWORDS: city identity, city image, Gorontalo, pahangga

Gorontalo, kota yang kaya akan sejarah dan budaya, memiliki banyak elemen arsitektur tradisional yang berfungsi sebagai simbol identitas dan warisan budaya masyarakatnya. Salah satu elemen penting dalam arsitektur tradisional Gorontalo adalah Pahangga. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi makna dan nilai Pahangga sebagai representasi identitas dan citra Kota Gorontalo. Pahangga yang merupakan ornamen budaya Gorontalo memiliki sejarah dan makna yang mendalam sebagai budaya lokal. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan semiotika, yaitu menganalisis tanda dan simbol untuk mengeksplorasi makna filosofis dan nilai budaya yang terkandung dalam elemen Pahangga. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Pahangga telah digunakan sebagai elemen dekoratif di berbagai bangunan publik, seperti gerbang sekolah, taman kota, dan gerbang batas. Pahangga tidak hanya memiliki makna simbolis yang terkait dengan hierarki sosial dan nilai budaya, tetapi juga berperan dalam membentuk identitas dan citra visual kota. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Pahangga memiliki potensi besar untuk diperkuat sebagai elemen pembentuk identitas dan citra Kota Gorontalo melalui penerapan yang lebih luas pada elemen perkotaan seperti jalur pejalan kaki dan landmark. Dengan demikian, kontribusi dan implikasi praktis diharapkan dapat menjadi panduan bagi perencanaan kota seperti arsitek, perencana kota, dan pihak-pihak yang terlibat dalam mengadopsi elemen budaya lokal sebagai bagian dari upaya menciptakan ruang publik yang inklusif, ikonik, dan bermakna secara budaya di tengah modernisasi kota.

KATA KUNCI: identitas kota, citra kota, Gorontalo, pahangga

INTRODUCTION

Gorontalo, a city rich in history and culture, has many elements of traditional architecture that serve as symbols of the identity and cultural heritage of its people (Heryati & Abdul, 2014). One important

element in Gorontalo's traditional architecture is the Pahangga.

Pahangga is not only a component of building but also a representation of the cultural values and identity of the Gorontalo community (Sudana, Suparno, & Dharsono, 2018). However, with the rapid

pace of modernization and globalization, traditional elements like *Pahangga* have increasingly been sidelined and often overlooked in urban planning and development.

The meaning and values contained within *Pahangga* have profound relevance to the cultural identity of Gorontalo. *Pahangga* reflects traditional aesthetics and holds philosophies and values passed down through generations. Unfortunately, many people, especially the younger generation, have little understanding or appreciation for the importance of this element in their daily lives. The lack of knowledge and understanding poses a significant challenge to the preservation of local culture. (Sari, Kurnia, Khasanah, & Ningtyas, 2022)

The context of modernization and urbanization presents new challenges in maintaining local cultural identity. *Pahangga*, as an element that reflects Gorontalo's identity, can function as a bridge between tradition and modernity. This study aims to examine in depth the meaning and value of *Pahangga* as a representation of the identity and image of Gorontalo City. This study specifically aims to: (1) analyze the implementation of *Pahangga* in urban architectural elements; (2) explore the perceptions of the community and cultural experts on the symbolic meaning of *Pahangga*; and (3) identify opportunities for integrating *Pahangga* elements into urban planning and design. Thus, this study is expected to provide a practical contribution in preserving local cultural elements while strengthening the visual identity of Gorontalo City.

As explained above, the contribution of this study is expected to provide a better understanding to the community about the importance of *Pahangga* in the context of the culture and identity of Gorontalo City. In this context, this study is expected to be a practical solution that can help architects, urban planners, and other city planners in integrating local cultural elements into designs that are relevant to today's needs.

City Identity and Urban Architecture

Identity is a characteristic or element that forms an individual, group, or location that has a distinctive feature from others. The identity of a city can be defined as a combination of physical components (architecture, spatial planning, landmarks), as well as non-physical components (history, culture, tradition, and social values) where these components function as markers of the characteristics and distinctiveness of a city (Suryani, 2020). Meanwhile, an image is a perception or picture formed in a person's experience of something, be it an individual, place, or a particular object.

In the context of a city, image encompasses how residents and outsiders view the city visually and emotionally (Lynch, 1960). Essentially, city identity is the reality of what a city is, while city image is the interpretation or perception of that reality by others (Aswin & Hidayat, 2019). Thus, identity is intrinsic and more permanent, while image is interpretive and can change according to a person's context or perspective.

Architecture can indirectly contribute significantly to shaping the elements that form a city, thus helping to create a visual identity and image of the city. Architectural design rooted in local culture, history, or community values can create a city that is not only easily recognizable but also able to provide a deep emotional experience for the community and visitors to the city (Hayden, 1997; Rapoport, 1982; Norberg-Schulz, 1980). These connections between physical form and cultural meaning reinforce the identity of a place and help shape how it is perceived and remembered.

According to Lynch, as explained in his book *The Image of the City* (1960), emphasizes the importance of visual and spatial elements in shaping the identity and image of a city. In this context, architecture has an important role in strengthening the identity of the city and shaping the collective image of the community about urban space. The relationship can be explained through several main elements, including path, edge, district, node, and landmark.

A path is a route that people use to move around the city, such as a road or sidewalk, which is the basis for orientation. Edges function as visual dividers or edges that provide structure to urban spaces, such as rivers or fences. Areas are areas with certain characteristics, such as commercial or residential districts, that give a unique identity to a part of the city. Nodes become focal points of activity, such as squares or major intersections, which help with orientation and social interaction. Meanwhile, signs or landmarks, such as monuments or towers, become visual elements that create strong memories. The combination of these five elements creates visual legibility (imageability) that influences how people understand, recognize, and connect with the city (Al-Kodmany, 2001).

For example, research on cultural identity in Gorontalo has been conducted, as discussed by Sudana (2022) where in their research, they discuss Karawo art as a symbol of Gorontalo cultural identity.

Several studies have also discussed symbolism in the architecture of traditional buildings in Gorontalo, which are inspired by traditional symbols. Research by Muhammad, Baruadi, Fatsah, & Djou (2023) on the construction of the Bantayo Poboide traditional building reveals the meaning and terms in its construction that reflect the cultural values and customs of the Gorontalo people. Then, research by

Eka & Imran (2022) in their study of the Dulohupa Traditional House highlights its role as a visual identity that is full of aesthetic values and cultural meanings.

In this case, it can be seen that several existing studies highlight more symbolic and philosophical meanings regarding the socio-cultural life of the Gorontalo people, as well as exploring their role in artistic expression and cultural identity. However, although there are several discussions about the art and symbols of *Pahangga*, there has been no study that specifically discusses *Pahangga* and how this element reflects the image and identity of the city of Gorontalo in a broader context, including in terms of urbanity and its role as a marker of the city's cultural identity. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring more deeply how *Pahangga*, as a symbolic element functions to strengthen the cultural identity and urban image of Gorontalo, which has not been widely studied in the existing literature.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method combined with a semiotic approach to interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in *Pahangga*'s architectural elements. Through semiotic analysis, signs and symbols are decoded to reveal the cultural narratives and philosophical values expressed in the building's form. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the deep meaning of cultural phenomena by focusing on interpretation, understanding, and contextual analysis. This approach is appropriate because this study aims to reveal the symbolic meaning of *Pahangga* in local culture and its relationship to city identity (Eco, 1976).

Data collection techniques include library studies, to review literature related to cultural symbols and city identity. Then, field observations, to observe the use of *Pahangga* in architecture and public spaces in Gorontalo, as well as in-depth interviews with community leaders, such as cultural experts and local architects to understand their interpretation of this symbol. The data obtained will be analyzed descriptively to identify patterns, meanings, values, and relevance of the *Pahangga* symbol.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Pahangga in Architecture and Public Space in Gorontalo City

The application of *Pahangga* ornaments in architecture and public spaces in Gorontalo City can be found in various buildings and infrastructure. For example, *Pahangga* ornaments on architectural elements of city parks and city border gates provide a strong visual identity while strengthening local

cultural values. In addition, several architectural elements at the entrance of the school gates apply *Pahangga* ornaments that create a harmonious relationship between traditional aesthetics and modernity. This shows that cultural elements can be applied to modern structures without losing their traditional essence.

However, the implementation of *Pahangga* ornaments also faces a number of challenges. One of the main challenges is the gap between the ideal design and execution in the field, which sometimes ignores the details or quality of the *Pahangga* motif. In addition, there is a tendency to use *Pahangga* only as a decorative element without considering its philosophical meaning, which can reduce the cultural value contained. A deep understanding of the meaning and value of *Pahangga* as part of local identity needs to be studied in depth, especially how to present the meaning and value of *Pahangga* from the aspects of shape, quantity, and color.

1. Shape

The term *Pahangga* comes from the Gorontalo language, which means palm sugar, wrapped in silar leaves and shaped like two combined pyramids (figure 1). The original form of *Pahangga*, which is wrapped palm sugar, actually has no meaning, but after being used as a traditional symbol, the shape of *Pahangga* is given meaning.



Figure 1. The origin of the form of *Pahangga* (palm sugar)
(Source: Author's Document, 2025)

The meaning of *Pahangga* in Gorontalo customs was explained by Baate Limboto, Lihu 81 years old. This informant's statement emphasized that the shape of *Pahangga* is a symbol of the dignity or rank of a leader in the government system during the kingdom era in Gorontalo.

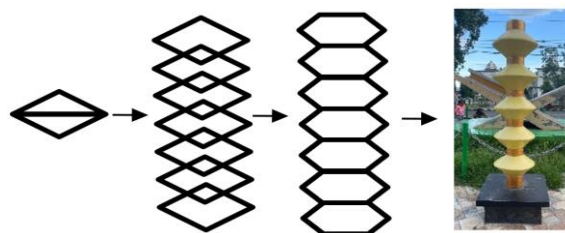


Figure 2. Transformation of the pillar ornaments from the *Pahangga*
(Source: Author's Document, 2025)

Based on Figure 2 regarding the transformation of pillar ornaments formed from the arrangement of basic palm sugar forms, it can be explained that the geometric shape of the *pahangga* is then arranged vertically to form a decoration that people usually use on seats or wedding dais at Gorontalo traditional weddings called Puade (Figure 3). In addition, the shape of this *pahangga* is also applied as a motif on the typical Gorontalo Karawo cloth as a geometric motif that has the meaning of local Gorontalo culture (Sudana, 2022)(Figure 3).



Figure 3. Use of pahangga forms in puade and karawo cloth motifs.

(Source: Author's Document, 2025)

2. Quantity

In ancient times, *pahangga* was placed in front of officials' houses to indicate a person's social level in a community group (Hasan, 2019). The hierarchy of power symbolized by the number of *pahangga* is actually a concept in the arrangement of government structures, so that leaders work according to their position and authority, so that the wheels of government run well. The *pahangga* ornaments on each front pillar of the house have varying numbers according to the social level of the homeowner, ranging from 5 to 13, according to their level. The village head is 5 *pahangga*, the Marsaoleh or sub-district head is 6 *pahangga*, the Jogugu or prime minister is 7-8 *pahangga*, and for the king is 9-13 *pahangga* (Figure 4).

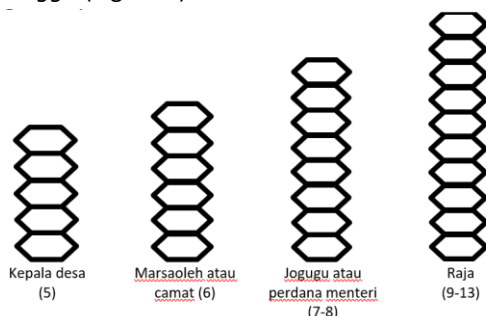


Figure 4. Number of thighs according to social level
(Source: Author's Document, 2025)

This meaning implies the idea that *pahangga* plays a role as a symbol of the rank and authority of a leader in the royal government system in Gorontalo. The hierarchy of power symbolized by the number of *pahangga* is a leadership concept to manage the government structure so that leaders work according to their authority and the wheels of government run smoothly. Although the government system changes, the concept remains relevant.

Currently, the tradition of using the number of *pahangga* as an ornament on the front pillars of houses according to social status has begun to be abandoned. The *pahangga* ornament has changed, which initially functioned as a symbol of the rank and authority of a leader in the royal government system, now developing into a distinctive symbol of Gorontalo, which is applied as an ornament on the pillars of public buildings and gates between regions in Gorontalo.

According to Akili (2012) the number of *pahangga* poles used as pillar ornaments consists of 10 *pahangga*, which symbolize the 10 (ten) kingdoms present at the inauguration meeting of the *Lou limo pohalaa* (five great kingdoms) tradition (Akili, 2012). *Limo Lo Pohalaa* includes *Pohalaa Gorontalo*, *Pohalaa Limboto*, *Pohalaa Suwawa*, *Pohalaa Boalemo*, and *Pohalaa Atinggola*.

3. Colour

According to Akili (2012) *Pahangga* has four colors that have meaning, namely green, which symbolizes prosperity, red symbolizes courage, yellow symbolizes glory, and purple symbolizes high respect for religion. One example of the application of color in the *pahangga* pole can be seen at the entrance gate of SDN No. 74 Kota Tengah in Gorontalo City (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The meaning of colors in Pahangga
(Source: Author's Document, 2025)

Pahangga Study as a City Image

Based on the five categories of urban visual elements according to Kevin Lynch, which are used to describe the city image, the following are the results of the analysis of the *Pahangga* study as the image of the city of Gorontalo:

1. Path

Based on the results of the researcher's observations after conducting a field survey in Gorontalo City, no *pahangga* forms were found to be used as decorative ornaments on highways or sidewalks. Vehicle routes along Gorontalo City, such as in the central area of the trading city and in the old city area, tend to have characteristics of building facades with Indian architectural style, namely a blend of Dutch culture with local Gorontalo culture.

2. Edge

The edge elements that become the boundaries between two areas in Gorontalo City and the surrounding districts use the *pahangga* form as an ornament on the city boundary pillars. This can be seen from the boundary gates between Gorontalo City and Bone Bolango Regency on the north and east sides, which have identical designs, both in terms of shape, number of *pahangga*, and color.



Figure 6. Application of *pahangga* ornaments on the boundary gate of Gorontalo City.
(Source: Author's Document, 2025)

From the Figure above, it can be seen that the boundary gate between these regions uses eight pillars divided on the left (four) and right (four) sides using *pahangga* ornaments. The colors used are four colors, namely red, green, yellow, and purple, according to the meaning of the *pahangga* color in the Gorontalo traditional customs. In terms of the number of *pahangga*, both of these boundary gates consist of nine *pahangga*, different from the provisions for the number of *pahangga*, which has the meaning of 10 kingdoms present at the *Lou limo pohalaa* customary inauguration meeting.

3. District

District elements in the Gorontalo City area show that most buildings with public functions, such as school entrance gates use *pahangga* ornaments. This can be seen in several elementary school gates in Gorontalo City that use *pahangga* ornaments (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Several school entrance gates in Gorontalo City
(Source: Author's Document, 2025)

The *pahangga* ornaments on the pillars of the school entrance gate have uniformity in terms of shape, number, and color. Of all the samples taken, all have identical *pahangga* arrangements on each pillar. In terms of quantity, each pillar consists of 10 *pahangga*, two pillars on each left and right side. In terms of color, all samples have green and yellow on the right side of the gate, while red and purple are on the left side of the gate. This shows that the application of *pahangga* elements as pillar ornaments on most school gates and government buildings has depicted the image of Gorontalo City that is not owned by other regions.

4. Nodes

Node elements that function as a meeting place for several activities, such as open spaces or parks are often found in Gorontalo. One of the parks that uses the *pahangga* form as a decorative ornament in the open space area is in the Limboto Cultural Park, Gorontalo Regency.



Figure 8. Pahangga ornaments at the Gorontalo Cultural Park, Limboto.
(Source: Author's Document, 2025)

In this park, *pahangga* is widely used as a decorative element along the park corridor, a decorative monument in front of the main gate to enter the park, and as a decorative element on every award monument in this park. The very high intensity of the use of the *pahangga* form in every corner of the park provides a clear affirmation that *pahangga* is a characteristic of Gorontalo culture, which is in line with the concept of this park, namely the Gorontalo Cultural Park.

Based on Figure 8, it can be seen that the use of *pahangga* elements has uniformity in terms of shape and color, but differs in terms of quantity. In terms of shape, the arrangement of each *pahangga* has a distance of about 5 cm, so that the pillars with *pahangga* ornaments look more tiered. In terms of color, the use of green, yellow, red, and purple is still used in accordance with the cultural values contained therein. However, in terms of quantity, there is diversity in each pillar with *pahangga* ornaments in this park. There are 4 *pahangga* ornaments at the gate and along the park corridor, 13 *pahangga* at each park monument.

5. Landmark

Based on the researcher's observation, no landmark elements were found that implement the shape or ornament of *pahangga* in Gorontalo. Several famous landmark elements in Gorontalo, namely the Limboto Majesty Tower, the Saronde Statue, the Bone Bolango Center Point Tower, the Yosonegoro Ketupat Monument, and others, do not display the *pahangga* ornament as a city landmark.

The application of *Pahangga* ornaments on the Edge, District, and Nodes elements has shown the cultural value of Gorontalo as the identity and image of the city of Gorontalo. At the city boundary gate, this ornament symbolizes the boundary symbol, and the transition of regional identity. At the school gate, *Pahangga* reflects diversity and emphasizes the character of cultural education. Meanwhile, in the city park, this ornament is a symbol of the meeting point and social interaction, adding to the aesthetics and appeal of the city.

However, in the Path element, there has been no application of *Pahangga* ornaments. City paths have great potential to be decorated with ornamental patterns as a guide or road paving decoration. Traditional *Pahangga* colors can be used to create visual harmony along the city entrance, pedestrian, or cultural corridor. With this development, Path can strengthen the identity of the path as an element that directs and at the same time strengthens the image of Gorontalo culture. This implementation can create a strong visual appeal while strengthening the city's cultural symbols.

Based on the analysis of Kevin Lynch's five urban image elements, it can be concluded that the *pahangga* form has not yet been fully integrated across all visual components of Gorontalo City. Its presence is most prominent in the edge, district, and node elements, particularly at city boundary gates, public building entrances such as schools, and open spaces like cultural parks. This indicates that *pahangga* has started to function as a distinctive visual identity marker, setting Gorontalo apart from other cities and reflecting the city's commitment to incorporating local heritage into its public spaces.

However, in the path and landmark elements, *pahangga* is still largely absent. Major streets and sidewalks do not incorporate this motif as part of their urban ornamentation, and significant landmarks throughout the city do not reflect the unique visual character that *pahangga* represents. This suggests that the potential of *pahangga* as a defining element of the city image is not yet fully realized or evenly distributed in urban design practices. The lack of its presence in such high-visibility and high-impact areas represents a missed opportunity for cultural expression in the city's most frequently navigated and recognized locations.

The partial application of *pahangga* also reveals a broader challenge in harmonizing traditional cultural symbols with contemporary urban design. While some government and public buildings have embraced the use of *pahangga*, its absence in modern infrastructure or newer developments indicates a disconnect between tradition and modernization. To bridge this gap, urban planning efforts in Gorontalo should prioritize inclusive design approaches that incorporate cultural motifs like *pahangga* in ways that are both aesthetically meaningful and functionally appropriate across all urban elements.

Therefore, *pahangga* holds great potential to be further developed as part of a strategic effort to build a culturally rooted city image. Consistent and comprehensive integration of *pahangga* into various city elements will not only strengthen Gorontalo's visual identity but also serve as a medium for preserving and promoting the cultural values of its community. It can enhance public awareness of local history and pride, create a stronger sense of place, and serve as a soft power tool for cultural tourism. Ultimately, embedding *pahangga* more deeply into the visual structure of the city will contribute to a more cohesive and unique urban identity. This identity, grounded in local wisdom and artistic expression, can differentiate Gorontalo in the broader national and regional context.

Table 1. The meaning and value of *Pahangga* as a representation of the identity and image of Gorontalo City based on Kevin Lynch's theory of city-forming elements.

City Elements (Kevin Lynch)	Implementation of Pahanga	Aspects (Shape, Color, Quantity)	The Meaning and Value of <i>Pahangga</i> as a City Identity and Image
Path	There is no application of <i>pahangga</i> ornaments on path elements.	-	-
Edge	City border gate	The two sample gates have identical shapes with eight pillars divided into the left (four) and right (four) sides. The colors used are four colors, namely red, green, yellow and purple according to the meaning of the <i>pahangga</i> color in the Gorontalo tradition. In terms of the number of <i>pahangga</i> , these boundary gates both consist of nine <i>pahangga</i> .	At the city boundary gate there are boundary symbols and transitions between regions that reflect the distinctive boundaries of the region and show the strong cultural identity of Gorontalo and provide a unique aesthetic image at the city boundary gate to promote the attractiveness of the city's image.
District	School entrance gate	All identified samples have identical <i>pahangga</i> arrangement forms on each pillar. In terms of quantity, each pillar consists of 10 <i>pahangga</i> , two pillars on each left and right side. In terms of color, all samples have green and yellow colors on the right side of the gate, while red and purple colors are on the left side of the gate.	The city's identity value emphasizes the characteristics of the area, especially schools, as part of the cultural values of the Gorontalo community. The application of <i>pahangga</i> colors and patterns creates visual consistency that is easily recognized. The value of <i>pahangga</i> ornaments on school gates shows a cultural representation that strengthens Gorontalo's image as a city of education rooted in culture.
Nodes	Ornaments in the city park area	The shape of the <i>pahangga</i> ornaments is diverse. The use of green, yellow, red and purple colors is still used in accordance with cultural values. In terms of quantity, there is diversity from each pillar with <i>pahangga</i> ornaments in the park area such as at the entrance and along the park corridor totaling 4, and the number of <i>pahangga</i> applied to the park monument ornaments is 13.	The Identity Value of the city park has represented Gorontalo as a city that prioritizes togetherness and social interaction in cultural values. The Image Value of the city park has added to the visual appeal of the park area, making it a meeting place with high aesthetic value.
Landmark	There has been no application of <i>pahangga</i> ornaments on landmark elements	-	-

CONCLUSION

Pahangga ornaments have significant value and meaning in representing the identity and image of Gorontalo City. The application of this ornament to city-forming elements such as Edge, District, and Nodes elements has shown *Pahangga*'s ability to reflect local cultural values. The city boundary gate, school gate, and ornaments in the city park area visually and philosophically emphasize the richness of Gorontalo culture, while providing a unique aesthetic image. However, the Path and Landmark elements have not been optimally utilized to display architectural elements in the form of *Pahangga* ornaments, which indicate opportunities for further development.

The potential for applying *Pahangga* ornaments to Path and Landmark elements is very large. City paths can be decorated with *Pahangga* ornament patterns on paving or sidewalks to strengthen visual identity as a guiding element. In addition, landmarks such as monuments or city monuments can use this ornament to increase visual appeal and emphasize Gorontalo cultural symbols. By utilizing these two elements, the application of *Pahangga* ornaments can play a more comprehensive role in building the visual identity and image of the city.

With further development, *Pahangga* ornaments will not only become cultural symbols but also part of urban planning designs that strengthen the identity and image of Gorontalo City. This effort will ensure that *Pahangga* will remain relevant in the face of modernization, while also making a major contribution to the preservation of local cultural values that can also attract the attention of local people and tourists in Gorontalo.

To adapt *Pahangga* without losing its essence, designers can preserve the gable roof form (bumbungan), key ornaments symbolizing social values, and the spatial hierarchy, while integrating modern materials and construction techniques for structural efficiency. These findings contribute to the discourse on vernacular architecture as a medium for sustaining cultural identity amid modernization. However, this study is limited to architectural analysis without exploring community perspectives on *Pahangga*'s

symbolism. Future research should incorporate stakeholder interviews to enrich understanding.

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