

Deconstructing the Connectivity of the Equator City Branding as an Instrument of Public Policy Communication with Tourism Infrastructure Development in Pontianak

Heriyanto^{1*}, Zulkifli², Fajar Aminullah³

^{1,2,3}Politeknik Negeri Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

City branding can function as public policy communication when a shared urban identity is translated into planning and physical development. This study examines how Pontianak's "Equator City" identity is interpreted and translated into tourism infrastructure across local government institutions. Using a qualitative case study, data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with three institutionally positioned informants from BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar, supported by local planning documents. The findings reveal an institutional interpretation gap: although the three agencies broadly share the symbolic meaning of Equator City, they attach different operational meanings to it according to their institutional mandates. Infrastructure may therefore substantively support the city's identity without being intentionally designed to communicate it. The study also distinguishes procedural coordination from substantive coordination, showing that routine inter-agency collaboration does not necessarily produce a shared interpretation of city identity. These findings highlight intra-governmental interpretation as an important link between city branding, public policy communication, and infrastructure development.

ABSTRAK

City branding dapat berfungsi sebagai komunikasi kebijakan publik ketika identitas kota yang disepakati bersama diterjemahkan ke dalam perencanaan dan pembangunan fisik. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana identitas Pontianak sebagai "Kota Khatulistiwa" diinterpretasikan dan diterjemahkan ke dalam pembangunan infrastruktur pariwisata oleh institusi pemerintah daerah. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan tiga informan yang mewakili posisi institusional BAPERIDA, PUPR, dan Disporapar, serta didukung oleh dokumen perencanaan daerah. Hasil penelitian menemukan adanya kesenjangan interpretasi institusional (institutional interpretation gap). Meskipun ketiga instansi memiliki pemahaman simbolik yang relatif sama mengenai identitas Kota Khatulistiwa, masing-masing memberikan makna operasional yang berbeda sesuai dengan mandat institusionalnya. Infrastruktur dapat mendukung identitas kota secara substantif tanpa secara sengaja dirancang untuk mengomunikasikan identitas tersebut. Penelitian ini juga membedakan koordinasi prosedural dan koordinasi substantif, serta menunjukkan bahwa kolaborasi rutin antarinstansi belum tentu menghasilkan interpretasi identitas kota yang sama. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya interpretasi intrapemerintah sebagai penghubung antara city branding, komunikasi kebijakan publik, dan pembangunan infrastruktur.

1. INTRODUCTION

Local governments increasingly use city identity not only as a promotional device but also as a means of communicating development priorities and shaping how a city is represented through public policy and the built environment. The more important question, therefore, is no longer simply whether a city has a recognizable brand, but whether that identity is understood and translated consistently by the government organizations responsible for implementing it. A city government is not a single actor; it consists of organizations with different legal mandates, technical standards, budgetary responsibilities, and professional orientations.

* Corresponding author, email address: heriyanto.radien@gmail.com

Consequently, the same identity narrative may acquire different operational meanings as it moves from planning to infrastructure development and tourism management. Infrastructure may ultimately support a city's image without having been intentionally designed as an expression of that identity. This distinction between infrastructure that is compatible with a city identity and infrastructure deliberately developed to communicate that identity provides the starting point for this study.

Pontianak provides a particularly relevant setting for examining this issue because its urban identity is grounded in distinctive and physically recognizable geographical features. Located directly on the equator, the city is strongly associated with the Equator Monument, while the Kapuas River and its longstanding river-city culture provide another important layer of local identity. These characteristics give "Pontianak, the Equator City" a symbolic foundation closely connected to physical space and therefore potentially relevant to infrastructure and tourism development. At the same time, the city's development direction for 2025–2029 is formally framed around the vision of being "Advanced, Prosperous, and Environmentally Conscious with a Humanist Outlook," with infrastructure development, collaborative governance, and service quality forming part of the broader development agenda. This creates an important governance setting: the Equator City identity must operate within a formal planning system that already has its own development priorities, indicators, institutional mandates, and technical requirements. The empirical issue is therefore not simply whether Pontianak possesses a strong city identity, but whether and how that identity enters the planning and infrastructure-development processes managed by different municipal organizations.

This issue becomes particularly important because urban identity is increasingly expressed through the built environment rather than through promotional messages alone. Roads, waterfronts, public spaces, heritage areas, tourism precincts, and other forms of infrastructure can contribute to how a city is experienced and interpreted. Yet these physical outcomes are produced through multiple stages of planning, budgeting, technical specification, construction, destination management, and maintenance. The relationship between city branding and infrastructure therefore depends on how an identity narrative travels across the organizations responsible for these different stages. In this context, the analytical problem lies within government itself: organizations may recognize the same urban identity while assigning different operational consequences to it.

Institutional theory provides a useful perspective for explaining this possibility. Organizations do not simply receive a policy idea and reproduce it unchanged; rather, they interpret it through the assumptions, professional norms, technical standards, and organizational priorities that constitute their institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012). Research on institutional logics in public organizations demonstrates that when multiple logics coexist within the same policy domain, implementing agencies may develop selective and locally rational translations of the same formal mandate (Xiao et al., 2025). In other words, organizations operating within the same governmental system do not necessarily converge on a single interpretation merely because they face the same policy expectations. A shared city identity may therefore pass through different institutional filters before it becomes a planning priority, technical specification, infrastructure decision, or budgetary commitment. This provides a theoretical basis for understanding why symbolic agreement at the city level does not automatically result in consistent implementation across government organizations.

Recent city-branding scholarship has increasingly recognized these governance dimensions. Studies have examined how branding operates within multi-level governance arrangements and how institutional models and access to authority affect branding processes (Alsayel et al., 2023). Other research has emphasized stakeholder participation and network management in sustaining support for place brands (Stevens et al., 2021; Ripoll González et al., 2025), while Collins (2024) demonstrates the connection between place branding and neighborhood governance. Collectively, these studies have significantly advanced understanding of who participates in city branding and how branding is organized within governance networks. However, they provide less explanation of what happens inside government organizations after a common identity has already been recognized, particularly when agencies with different mandates must translate that identity into physical development.

This limitation becomes more apparent when city-branding research is considered alongside studies of institutional logics and the built environment. Institutional research has shown that organizational arrangements and differing institutional logics can produce variations in policy implementation (Sager & Gofen, 2022; Xiao et al., 2025). Meanwhile, infrastructure research increasingly recognizes the built environment as more than a technical artifact. Infrastructure can function as a shared and meaning-carrying component

of urban space (Park et al., 2024), while physical and non-physical characteristics contribute to how residents interpret urban identity (Do & Do, 2025). Yet these streams of research remain insufficiently connected. City-branding studies have generally focused on governance networks, stakeholder participation, and branding performance, whereas institutional and infrastructure studies have paid less attention to how different municipal organizations translate a shared city-branding narrative into concrete physical decisions.

The research gap addressed in this study therefore lies specifically at the intersection of city branding, institutional interpretation, inter-agency translation, and infrastructure development. What remains insufficiently explained is why a city identity that is symbolically recognized across government organizations may still be translated unevenly into infrastructure. Rather than assuming that such unevenness simply reflects weak branding or inadequate implementation, this study examines whether different institutional mandates and professional logics generate different interpretations of what the same identity requires in practice. Pontianak offers an appropriate case because BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar occupy different but interconnected positions in the planning, technical development, and tourism management of the city's physical and tourism spaces. Examining these organizations makes it possible to trace how a common symbolic identity encounters different institutional interpretations before it becomes – or fails to become – an intentional component of infrastructure development.

Building on this gap, the study investigates how differences in institutional mandates and interpretations shape the translation of the “Equator City” identity into tourism infrastructure development in Pontianak. The main research question is: How do differences in institutional mandates and interpretations shape the translation of the “Equator City” identity into tourism infrastructure development in Pontianak? Three sub-questions guide the analysis: (1) How is the Equator City identity interpreted by BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar? (2) How do these institutional interpretations influence the translation of the branding narrative into infrastructure development? and (3) What explains the distinction between infrastructure that substantively supports Pontianak's identity and infrastructure intentionally designed to communicate that identity?

The novelty of this study lies in developing the concept of an institutional interpretation gap to explain a specific condition in which government organizations recognize and support the same city identity but do not necessarily share an operational understanding of what that identity requires within their respective mandates. This concept differs from weak institutionalization, which primarily concerns the absence or limited strength of formal rules and institutional arrangements; from an implementation gap, which generally refers to a discrepancy between policy intentions and implementation outcomes; and from coordination failure, which implies inadequate interaction or cooperation among implementing actors. An institutional interpretation gap may persist even when agencies formally recognize the same identity and routinely coordinate with one another, because the central problem lies in the absence of a sufficiently shared interpretation that can connect planning priorities, technical standards, and tourism-management objectives. Building on this distinction, the study further differentiates between infrastructure that substantively supports a city's identity because it is compatible with that identity and infrastructure intentionally designed as an instrument of policy communication because the identity has explicitly informed its planning or design. Together, these distinctions provide a more precise analytical framework for understanding how city branding moves – or fails to move – from symbolic recognition to physical and spatial expression within multi-agency urban governance.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Physical Environment as a Historical Premise, Not the Analytical Center

Physical development is treated in this study as a material expression of governmental choices rather than as a separate category of communication. This perspective shifts attention from the physical form itself to the organizational processes that precede it: how a city-identity narrative is interpreted within government organizations, translated into administrative and technical expectations, negotiated across institutional boundaries, and eventually reflected – or not reflected – in infrastructure decisions. The analytical center of the study is therefore not a typology of city-branding communication, but the institutional processes through which symbolic identity is translated into physical and spatial outcomes.

This distinction is important because the existence of infrastructure that appears compatible with a city's identity does not necessarily demonstrate that the identity guided its planning or design. A waterfront,

public space, heritage area, or tourism facility may strengthen the image of a city while having been developed primarily to address service, accessibility, technical, or other development needs. Accordingly, understanding infrastructure as an expression of city identity requires attention not only to its final physical appearance but also to the institutional processes through which planning intentions are interpreted and converted into development decisions.

2.2 Institutional Logics: Why the Same Identity Can Mean Different Things

Institutional logics refer to the belief systems, norms, assumptions, and practices through which organizational members determine what is appropriate, valuable, and technically legitimate within their institutional domain (Thornton et al., 2012). Different municipal organizations may therefore respond differently to the same city-identity narrative because they operate according to different professional and organizational priorities. A planning agency tends to emphasize synchronization, sequencing, and alignment with broader development policies; a public-works agency emphasizes technical standards, safety, budget discipline, and measurable service outcomes; while a tourism agency is more concerned with destination appeal, visitor experience, and cross-sector coordination.

From this perspective, an identity narrative such as “Equator City” does not enter a neutral organizational environment. It is interpreted through the institutional logic of the organization receiving it. Consequently, the same identity can be understood as a planning and synchronization issue by one agency, a matter of technical standards by another, and a destination-management issue by a third. These interpretations do not necessarily indicate that one agency accepts the identity while another rejects it. Rather, they reflect different organizational understandings of what the identity requires in practice.

Recent institutional-logics research supports this argument. Public organizations confronted with multiple or competing institutional logics do not necessarily resolve them by adopting a single dominant interpretation. Instead, they may respond through selective and context-sensitive translations that remain rational within their respective organizational settings (Xiao et al., 2025). Similarly, municipal organizations operating under the same external pressures may develop different local translations because they draw on symbolic and normative reference points associated with their particular positions within the governance field (Patalon, 2026). Institutional logics therefore provide the structural explanation for why BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar may all recognize the Equator City identity while assigning different operational implications to it.

2.3 Organizational Sensemaking: How Agencies Construct What the Identity Means

While institutional logics explain why organizations possess different interpretive frames, organizational sensemaking explains how actors construct workable meanings within those frames. Sensemaking refers to the process through which organizational actors notice relevant cues, organize those cues into plausible interpretations, and use those interpretations as a basis for action (Weick et al., 2005). Meaning, from this perspective, is not simply received from a policy statement or city-branding narrative; it is actively constructed through the organizational context in which actors work.

Applied to Pontianak, this perspective helps explain why officials may attach different practical meanings to the same Equator City identity. A planning official may focus on RPJMD indicators, policy synchronization, and development priorities; a technical official may focus on whether the identity has been translated into design standards, technical specifications, or terms of reference; and a tourism official may emphasize destination appeal, visitor experience, and inter-agency support for tourism development. These different cues shape how actors determine what the Equator City identity means for their respective responsibilities.

Sensemaking therefore complements institutional logics rather than replacing it. Institutional logics provide the broader organizational frame within which certain considerations become legitimate or important, whereas sensemaking explains how actors use those considerations to construct a plausible interpretation of the identity in specific situations. This perspective also avoids treating differences among agencies as simply correct or incorrect readings of the brand. Instead, the analysis focuses on how each interpretation becomes locally coherent within the institutional responsibilities of the organization producing it.

2.4 Policy Translation and Implementation across Institutional Arrangements

Between institutional interpretation and physical development lies the process of policy translation and implementation. Sager and Gofen (2022) argue that policy implementation is shaped not only by the clarity of a policy idea but also by the organizational and institutional arrangements through which multiple actors coordinate their actions. Implementation outcomes may therefore vary because a policy idea passes through organizations with different responsibilities, procedures, and professional expectations before it becomes operational.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the Equator City identity because no single municipal organization controls the entire process through which city identity may become infrastructure. Planning, technical development, tourism management, budgeting, and implementation are distributed across different institutional actors. An identity narrative must therefore move across organizational boundaries before it can influence a physical project. During this process, its original meaning may be maintained, modified, weakened, or translated into different operational requirements.

Policy translation consequently provides the link between the interpretation constructed within individual organizations and the collective process through which infrastructure decisions are produced. Where agencies share a sufficiently clear interpretive reference, the identity may be carried more consistently from planning into technical implementation. Where such a reference is absent, translation may become uneven even when none of the participating agencies actively rejects the identity. The relevant issue is therefore not simply whether coordination occurs, but whether coordination enables different institutional interpretations to converge sufficiently to guide physical development.

2.5 Infrastructure and the Built Environment as Carriers of Institutional Meaning

Infrastructure constitutes the material stage at which institutional interpretation and policy translation become visible. Recent research in urban design governance and infrastructure studies suggests that the built environment should not be treated merely as a technical outcome or passive background to city branding. White et al. (2024) show that the production of well-designed places depends on governance mechanisms capable of translating planning intentions into consistent physical outcomes across multiple actors and stages of development. When this translation is weak or fragmented, the relationship between initial intention and final built form may also weaken.

Similarly, Park et al. (2024) conceptualize infrastructure as a shared urban resource whose significance extends beyond technical function. From this perspective, infrastructure contributes to collective urban meaning because roads, public spaces, waterfronts, facilities, and other physical assets become part of how residents and visitors experience the city. Do and Do (2025) further demonstrate that both physical and non-physical factors influence how residents perceive urban identity. The built environment can therefore communicate aspects of city identity even when that communicative role was not explicitly incorporated into the original design process.

This perspective supports an important analytical distinction in the present study. Substantively supportive infrastructure refers to physical development that reinforces or is compatible with the city's identity even though the identity may not have explicitly guided its design. In contrast, intentionally communicative infrastructure refers to physical development in which the city identity has deliberately informed planning, design standards, technical requirements, or project briefs. This distinction allows the study to examine not only whether Pontianak's infrastructure appears compatible with the Equator City identity, but also whether that compatibility results from an intentional process of institutional translation.

2.6 Integrating Institutional Logics, Sensemaking, Policy Translation, and Infrastructure

The four theoretical perspectives are connected as complementary stages of a single explanatory process. Institutional logics provide the organizational structures and professional frames through which different agencies determine what is relevant and legitimate. Organizational sensemaking explains how actors use those frames to construct practical meanings from the Equator City narrative. Policy translation and implementation explain what happens when these organization-specific interpretations move across institutional boundaries and must be reconciled through inter-agency coordination. Finally, infrastructure and the built environment represent the material domain in which the consequences of those interpretive and translational processes become observable.

The relationship among these perspectives is therefore sequential but not purely mechanical. Institutional mandates shape organizational logics, organizational logics influence sensemaking, and sensemaking produces interpretations that subsequently enter inter-agency processes. Coordination may preserve these interpretations, reconcile them, or allow them to remain different. Infrastructure decisions consequently reflect not only technical and financial considerations but also the extent to which different institutional interpretations have been translated into a sufficiently shared operational reference. This integrated perspective provides the theoretical foundation for examining the institutional interpretation gap introduced in this study: a condition in which organizations recognize the same city identity but attach different operational meanings to what that identity requires within their respective institutional responsibilities.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Based on this theoretical integration, the conceptual framework traces how the Equator City narrative moves from symbolic identity to physical and spatial expression within municipal governance. The process begins with the Equator City Narrative, which enters organizations operating under different Institutional Mandates. These mandates provide different organizational logics and influence how officials engage in Institutional Interpretation through sensemaking. The interpretations produced within each organization subsequently enter Inter-Agency Translation, where procedural and substantive coordination determine the extent to which different meanings are reconciled into a common operational reference.

The consequences of this translation process become visible in Infrastructure Decisions and subsequently in Physical/Spatial Expression. At this stage, the framework distinguishes between infrastructure that is substantively supportive of the Equator City identity and infrastructure that is intentionally communicative, meaning that the identity explicitly informed planning or design decisions. These physical outcomes ultimately contribute to Policy Communication Credibility, because the consistency between the identity communicated by government and the urban environment experienced by residents and visitors depends partly on whether symbolic narratives are translated into observable development decisions.

Accordingly, the framework follows the analytical sequence: Equator City Narrative → Institutional Mandates → Institutional Interpretation → Inter-Agency Translation → Infrastructure Decisions → Physical/Spatial Expression → Policy Communication Credibility. This sequence does not imply a deterministic causal relationship between each stage. Rather, it serves as an analytical framework for tracing where the meaning of the Equator City identity may be maintained, modified, or weakened as it moves across municipal organizations. The principal explanatory focus remains on institutional interpretation and inter-agency translation, while infrastructure provides the observable physical domain through which the consequences of these processes can be examined.

A feedback relationship between Physical/Spatial Expression and Institutional Interpretation is also theoretically plausible. Existing infrastructure may provide new organizational cues and thereby influence how government actors subsequently understand the Equator City identity. However, because the present study relies on a single round of interviews with each informant, the available data cannot empirically establish such a longitudinal feedback process. The feedback path in Figure 1 should therefore be understood as an exploratory theoretical relationship rather than a confirmed empirical finding.

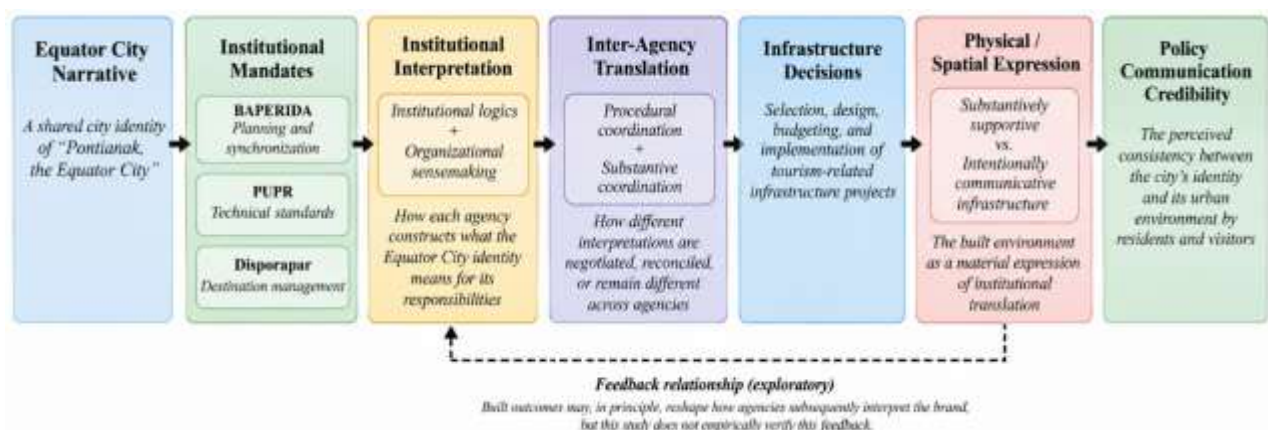


Figure 1. Institutional Interpretation and Infrastructure Translation Model.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design focusing on Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The approach was selected to understand how government organizations with different institutional mandates interpret the same city-identity narrative and translate it into infrastructure-related decisions rather than to measure statistical relationships among variables. Pontianak was treated as a single institutional case involving multiple organizational perspectives. The unit of analysis was the institutional interpretation and translation process through which the Equator City identity is connected to tourism infrastructure development, particularly across municipal organizations responsible for planning, technical infrastructure, and tourism management.

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with three purposively selected institutional informants: an official from the Regional Development Planning, Research, and Innovation Agency (BAPERIDA), the Head of the Public Works and Spatial Planning Office (PUPR), and the Head of the Youth, Sports and Tourism Office (Disporapar) of Pontianak City. The PUPR interview was conducted on 22 May 2026, while the BAPERIDA and Disporapar interviews were conducted on 27 May 2026. These organizations were selected because their functions represent three institutional domains central to the study: development planning and policy synchronization, technical infrastructure and construction, and destination identity and tourism management. One strategically positioned informant from each organization was selected to provide an information-rich institutional perspective rather than statistical representation. Accordingly, their accounts are treated as institutionally situated perspectives and not as exhaustive representations of all views within their respective organizations.

The semi-structured interviews focused on the informants' understanding of the Equator City identity, its relationship with their institutional mandates, its position within planning and infrastructure development, inter-agency coordination, and the conditions facilitating or constraining its translation into physical development. Interview evidence was complemented by documentary analysis of the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), Regional Government Work Plan (RKPD), and other available sectoral planning documents. These documents were used to compare institutional accounts with formal planning directions and to examine how the Equator City identity was positioned within the policy and development framework. The same interviews and documents also inform a related manuscript examining city-branding communication; however, the present study addresses a distinct research question by focusing specifically on institutional logics, organizational sensemaking, inter-agency translation, and infrastructure outcomes.

Data were analyzed manually using the logic of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification proposed by Miles et al. (2014). The analysis began with repeated reading of the interview material to identify statements concerning institutional mandates, interpretations of the Equator City identity, coordination, infrastructure decisions, and implementation constraints. Relevant statements were grouped thematically and compared across BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar to identify convergence, divergence, and tension among institutional accounts. The resulting themes were then systematically compared with the RPJMD, RKPD, and sectoral planning documents. This cross-institutional analysis supported the identification of the study's central analytical categories, including the institutional interpretation gap, procedural versus substantive coordination, and substantively supportive versus intentionally communicative infrastructure.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, documentary comparison, and systematic cross-institutional analysis. Statements from the three informants were compared with one another and, where relevant, checked against formal planning documents. Divergent accounts were retained as analytical evidence because differences in institutional interpretation constitute the central concern of the study. Nevertheless, the methodological boundaries should be recognized. Each organization was represented by one informant interviewed once, meaning that the findings capture institutionally situated accounts at a particular point in time rather than comprehensive organizational perspectives or longitudinal changes. Furthermore, the study did not include community members, tourists, private-sector actors, or other municipal organizations. The findings are therefore limited to intra-governmental interpretation and translation and should not be interpreted as direct evidence of public reception of the Equator City identity.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Shared Identity, Different Institutional Meanings

The three institutional accounts show substantial agreement regarding the symbolic foundations of Pontianak's identity. BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar all identify the Equator Monument as the city's principal geographical marker and recognize the Kapuas River as an important element of Pontianak's river-city character. BAPERIDA places these symbols within a broader understanding of urban identity that also includes cleanliness, spatial order, culinary culture, public services, and community behavior. Disporapar similarly associates the Equator City identity with geographical position, climate, peatland, the Kapuas River, and community life. Taken together, these accounts indicate that the main difference among the three organizations does not concern what symbolizes Pontianak, but rather what those symbols are expected to mean for institutional action.

The divergence becomes clearer when the informants describe the position of the identity within development processes. BAPERIDA's account indicates that the RPJMD is primarily organized around broader development outcomes and alignment with national policy, while distinctive local characteristics are more likely to be translated at the technical level of individual agencies. PUPR similarly recognizes Equator City as an established identity but emphasizes that it has not yet become a binding technical reference for physical development; infrastructure decisions are more directly guided by the RPJMD, RKPD, service requirements, and the mayor's development vision. Disporapar, by contrast, assigns a more explicit developmental role to the identity by linking it to tourism areas and the city's geographical characteristics. These institutionally situated accounts provide the empirical basis for what this study terms an institutional interpretation gap: the agencies recognize the same symbolic identity but do not attach the same operational meaning to it.

This finding extends the argument of Eshuis and Ripoll González (2025) that place branding cannot be understood solely through symbolic representation because place identity is also produced through action and experience. It is also consistent with Alsayel et al. (2023), who demonstrate that institutional arrangements and access to authority influence how branding operates within governance systems. In Pontianak, therefore, the central issue is not the absence of symbolic agreement but the absence of an equally shared interpretation of how that symbolism should inform planning, technical development, and tourism management.

4.2 Institutional Mandates and Divergent Interpretations

The differences become more visible when the three institutional accounts are compared in terms of how closely the Equator City identity should be connected to development. Disporapar's account places the identity relatively close to tourism and area development, describing roads, drainage, the waterfront, the Equator Monument, and related improvements as elements that can support Pontianak's geographical and tourism character. BAPERIDA positions the identity more broadly within planning and synchronization but does not describe it as a primary RPJMD indicator. PUPR adopts the most technical interpretation, emphasizing the absence of a specific design standard or other binding technical reference requiring infrastructure projects to express the Equator City identity.

Rather than treating these differences as competing personal opinions, the evidence suggests that they correspond to the institutional positions occupied by the informants. BAPERIDA evaluates the identity from the perspective of development synchronization, PUPR from technical standards and infrastructure requirements, and Disporapar from destination identity and tourism management. The evidence therefore supports an interpretation in which institutional mandate provides an important context for understanding why the same city identity acquires different operational meanings. However, given the limited number of informants, these patterns should be understood as institutionally situated interpretations rather than exhaustive representations of each organization.

This pattern is consistent with institutional-logics research showing that organizations facing a common policy environment can nevertheless produce locally coherent interpretations based on their respective institutional positions (Xiao et al., 2025; Patalon, 2026). Organizational sensemaking further helps explain this process because actors construct meaning from cues that are particularly relevant to their roles (Weick et al., 2005). In the Pontianak case, planning indicators, technical standards, and destination-development considerations appear as different interpretive cues through which the same Equator City narrative is understood.

4.3 Translating the Equator Narrative into Infrastructure

The findings do not support describing the relationship between the Equator City identity and infrastructure as completely disconnected. BAPERIDA identifies the Equator Monument area, the Kapuas River waterfront, the old town, the sultanate compound, the royal cemetery, Pasar Tengah, and riverside areas as physical spaces that contribute to strengthening the city's character. Disporapar similarly associates roads, waterfront development, the Equator Monument, and area development with Pontianak's geographical and tourism identity. These accounts indicate that several infrastructure projects are substantively compatible with the Equator City and river-city narratives.

PUPR's account, however, introduces an important qualification. From the technical perspective reported by the informant, many infrastructure projects were primarily intended to improve service quality, accessibility, functionality, and urban comfort rather than to implement an explicit city-branding requirement. The informant also points to the absence of specific standards requiring Equator-related ornamental forms, colors, street furniture, area designs, or other visual elements. The available evidence therefore supports a distinction between substantively supportive infrastructure, which is compatible with and may reinforce the city's identity, and intentionally communicative infrastructure, in which that identity explicitly informs project planning or design.

This distinction should not be interpreted as evidence that one institutional interpretation directly caused particular infrastructure outcomes. The interview and documentary evidence do not provide longitudinal process tracing capable of establishing such a causal sequence. Rather, the accounts suggest an association between the absence of a shared design reference and the uneven intentional translation of the identity into physical development. This interpretation is consistent with White et al. (2024), who show that design-governance mechanisms are important for carrying planning intentions across multiple actors and development stages. Evidence from the broader West Kalimantan tourism-policy context also indicates that cross-sectoral coordination and institutional capacity can influence the relationship between policy substance and implementation (Heriyanto et al., 2025).

4.4 Procedural Coordination versus Substantive Coordination

The findings also indicate that inter-agency coordination already occurs in Pontianak. Disporapar reports coordinating with PUPR, the Transportation Office (Dishub), the Communication and Informatics Office (Kominfo), the Housing and Settlement Office (Perkim), and the Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP), particularly where tourism development requires technical support from multiple agencies. The evidence therefore does not indicate an absence of coordination. Instead, it suggests a distinction between coordination concerned with implementing tasks and coordination concerned with aligning interpretations.

This study conceptualizes the first as procedural coordination: agencies communicate, divide responsibilities, and implement activities according to their respective mandates. The second is termed substantive coordination: agencies develop a sufficiently shared understanding of what the Equator City identity should require in planning and physical development. Based on the three institutional accounts, procedural coordination appears more visible than substantive coordination. None of the informants identifies a specific guideline, design standard, or dedicated mechanism whose primary purpose is to reconcile the planning, technical, and tourism interpretations of the Equator City identity before infrastructure projects reach the design stage.

This interpretation should nevertheless remain cautious. The evidence demonstrates that such a mechanism was not identified by the three informants; it does not establish that informal alignment never occurs elsewhere within the municipal administration. The analytical distinction remains useful because it explains how routine coordination can coexist with different interpretations of the same identity. This is consistent with Ito and Denscombe (2025), who emphasize the importance of translating shared identity into an institutional agenda, and with evidence from Pontianak's tourism-governance context emphasizing institutional capacity and collaborative governance (Heriyanto et al., 2026).

4.5 Infrastructure Translation under Land, Budget, and Maintenance Constraints

Institutional interpretation is not the only factor shaping physical development. BAPERIDA and Disporapar identify land-related constraints around the Equator Monument area, where the status or control of strategically located land limits the municipal government's ability to undertake permanent development. Disporapar also identifies budget limitations as a constraint on tourism-area development. These accounts

demonstrate that even if agencies developed a more consistent interpretation of the Equator City identity, its physical translation would still depend on land availability, fiscal capacity, institutional authority, and other implementation conditions.

The findings also extend beyond project construction. BAPERIDA's account points to damaged waterfront facilities, missing lighting, and the underuse of a culinary area as examples of post-construction challenges. These observations suggest that the relationship between city identity and infrastructure continues through maintenance, management, and use. Infrastructure that initially supports a city narrative may communicate that identity less effectively when its physical condition or use deteriorates.

This interpretation is consistent with Park et al. (2024), who conceptualize infrastructure as a shared urban resource whose meaning develops through its use and management, and with Mbinza (2024), who connects place branding with broader social and governance processes. The OECD (2026) similarly positions place branding within policy coordination and place transformation rather than image management alone. The Pontianak evidence therefore suggests that institutional alignment may be important for intentional translation, but it is not sufficient on its own; land, budget, implementation, maintenance, and use also shape the eventual relationship between city identity and physical space.

4.6 From Symbolic Alignment to Institutional Translation

Taken together, Sections 4.1–4.5 reveal a progression from symbolic alignment to uneven institutional translation. At the symbolic level, the three institutional accounts converge around the Equator Monument, the Kapuas River, and Pontianak's geographical distinctiveness. At the operational level, however, they differ in the extent to which this identity should guide planning, technical standards, and tourism development. Existing infrastructure can therefore reinforce the city's identity without necessarily having originated from a shared branding framework.

This finding refines the concept of the institutional interpretation gap introduced earlier. The gap does not refer simply to the absence of regulation, nor does it imply institutional conflict. It refers more specifically to a condition in which organizations recognize the same identity while attaching different operational implications to it. This extends public-branding research that emphasizes governance networks and stakeholder relationships (Stevens et al., 2021; Zavattaro et al., 2021) by drawing attention to an earlier intra-governmental stage: before a city identity can be communicated consistently through physical development, it must first acquire sufficiently compatible meanings across the organizations responsible for implementing it.

4.7 Why Do BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar Interpret the Same Identity Differently?

The evidence provides a direct answer to the first analytical question: the three accounts differ primarily in how the Equator City identity is interpreted through their respective institutional responsibilities. BAPERIDA's account emphasizes planning direction and synchronization; PUPR's account emphasizes technical standards and the need for an explicit operational basis; and Disporapar's account emphasizes destination identity and tourism development. The findings therefore suggest that differences in institutional mandate provide an important context for differences in interpretation.

This conclusion should not be read as demonstrating a deterministic relationship in which institutional mandate automatically produces a particular interpretation. With one informant from each organization, the study cannot exclude other organizational or individual influences. Rather, the observed pattern is consistent with institutional logics and sensemaking theory: organizational actors interpret common narratives through institutionally relevant cues and construct locally plausible meanings from them (Weick et al., 2005; Xiao et al., 2025; Patalon, 2026). The contribution of the Pontianak case is therefore to show how this theoretical mechanism may operate within the intra-governmental translation of a city-branding narrative.

4.8 How Do Interpretive Differences Shape Physical Translation?

The second analytical question concerns what these different interpretations mean for infrastructure. The available evidence suggests that the absence of a common operational interpretation is associated with infrastructure that often supports the Equator City identity substantively without being demonstrably derived from that identity as an explicit design requirement. BAPERIDA's account indicates that the identity is not a primary RPJMD indicator, PUPR emphasizes the absence of a dedicated technical or design standard, while

Disporapar interprets several existing infrastructure improvements as already supportive of the city's identity. Read together, these accounts indicate different institutional understandings of when infrastructure can be considered an expression of city branding.

The evidence does not establish a definitive causal sequence in which BAPERIDA's interpretation directly determines PUPR's decisions and subsequently shapes Disporapar's interpretation. Rather, the cross-institutional comparison suggests a translation pattern: no shared operational reference was identified that consistently connects planning direction, technical requirements, and tourism interpretation. This cautious interpretation is consistent with White et al. (2024), who emphasize governance mechanisms capable of carrying design intentions across multiple stages, and with Ito and Denscombe (2025), who highlight the importance of institutional alignment in translating shared identity into coordinated action.

4.9 Implications for Public Administration, Urban Governance, and City Branding

The findings have implications beyond Pontianak. For city branding as public policy communication, they suggest that symbolic recognition of a city identity should be distinguished from its operational translation. A city may possess a recognizable brand and functioning inter-agency coordination while still lacking a sufficiently shared interpretation of what that identity should mean for physical development. Assessing city branding as a governance process therefore requires attention not only to promotional communication or formal policy recognition, but also to how the identity is interpreted within implementing organizations.

For public administration and urban governance, the Pontianak case highlights the importance of distinguishing coordination of responsibilities from coordination of meaning. Routine coordination can enable projects to proceed without necessarily producing a shared interpretive framework. The findings therefore point to the potential value of an inter-agency interpretive or design reference capable of connecting planning, technical infrastructure, and destination-management considerations. This should be understood as an implication derived from the observed pattern rather than as evidence that a particular governance instrument has already been proven effective in Pontianak. More broadly, the case suggests that the credibility of city branding as public policy communication depends partly on whether a symbolic narrative can travel across organizational boundaries and remain sufficiently coherent when it reaches the built environment.

Table 1. Cross-Institutional Synthesis of Findings

Dimension	BAPERIDA	PUPR	Disporapar	Analytical Interpretation
Meaning of the brand	City identity should be supported by development as a whole	Strong geographical identity, but primarily understood as city identity/logo	Geographical identity linked to river-city character, culture, and tourism	Symbolic meaning is broadly shared across the three accounts
Position within policy framework	Part of general planning direction and synchronization, but not a primary indicator	No dedicated binding technical or design standard was identified	Identity should be reflected in development and tourism areas	The operational policy meaning of the identity differs across institutional accounts
Infrastructure	Equator Monument, waterfront, heritage town, and historic areas strengthen city character	Projects may support the city's image but are primarily driven by technical and service requirements	Roads, drainage, waterfront, and the Monument are interpreted as supporting city character	Infrastructure can be substantively supportive without being intentionally designed from a shared branding framework
Coordination	Operates through the development-planning system	Guided by technical mandates and planning documents	Coordination occurs with PUPR, Dishub, Kominfo, Perkim, and Satpol PP	Procedural coordination is more evident than coordination around a shared interpretation
Implementation constraints	Land, facility maintenance, and community use/readiness	Absence of dedicated standards and explicit technical reference	Land, budget, and implementation limitations	Interpretive alignment alone would not eliminate practical implementation constraints

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

This study examined how differences in institutional mandates and interpretations shape the translation of Pontianak's "Equator City" identity into tourism infrastructure development. The findings show that BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar broadly share the symbolic meaning of the city's identity but differ in its operational interpretation: BAPERIDA approaches it through planning and synchronization, PUPR through technical standards and infrastructure requirements, and Disporapar through destination identity and tourism management. This condition reflects an institutional interpretation gap, in which symbolic agreement does not automatically produce a shared understanding of how identity should guide physical development. Consequently, existing infrastructure may substantively support the Equator City identity without having been intentionally designed to communicate it, while inter-agency coordination appears stronger at the procedural level than at the substantive level of shared interpretation. The Pontianak case therefore suggests that translating city identity into infrastructure requires not only symbolic recognition and routine coordination but also sufficient alignment among the institutional actors responsible for planning, technical implementation, tourism management, and maintenance. These conclusions should nevertheless be understood within the empirical boundaries of this single-city case.

This study contributes theoretically by developing the institutional interpretation gap as a case-derived analytical concept describing a condition in which organizations recognize the same identity narrative but attach different operational meanings to it because of differences in institutional mandates and professional logics. Rather than replacing explanations based on weak institutionalization, implementation gaps, or coordination problems, this concept complements them by directing attention to differences in interpretation within government. The study also distinguishes between substantively supportive infrastructure, which reinforces city identity without necessarily being designed for that purpose, and intentionally communicative infrastructure, in which identity explicitly informs planning or design decisions. In addition, the distinction between procedural and substantive coordination provides a way to explain how agencies can coordinate effectively in implementing tasks while still lacking a shared understanding of what a city identity requires in practice. Because these analytical propositions are derived from one city, three organizations, and one informant from each organization, their applicability requires further examination in other institutional and urban contexts.

The practical implications follow directly from three findings: the agencies interpret the Equator City identity differently, no common design reference was identified in the institutional accounts, and procedural coordination appears more developed than substantive coordination. Rather than requiring every infrastructure project to become a branding project or assuming that additional regulation is the only solution, Pontianak could consider developing a shared interpretive reference, such as agreed design principles, project-specific criteria, an inter-agency guideline, or another appropriate coordination mechanism that connects BAPERIDA's planning perspective, PUPR's technical requirements, and Disporapar's destination-management priorities before relevant projects reach the design and implementation stages. Such an approach could focus particularly on identity-relevant areas such as tourism precincts, waterfronts, public spaces, heritage areas, and city gateways, while also extending to maintenance and post-construction management. The practical priority is therefore to strengthen the connection between shared interpretation, technical implementation, inter-agency coordination, and the continued management of identity-relevant infrastructure, although this study does not determine which specific governance instrument would be most effective.

This study is limited by its reliance on one informant from each of BAPERIDA, PUPR, and Disporapar interviewed once, meaning that the findings represent institutionally positioned perspectives rather than exhaustive evidence of organizational consensus. The study also focuses exclusively on government actors and therefore cannot determine whether communities, tourists, businesses, or other stakeholders interpret the Equator City identity and related infrastructure in the same way. Furthermore, the analytical concepts were developed from a single-city, three-agency setting, while the cross-sectional design does not provide sufficient process-tracing evidence to establish a definitive causal sequence from planning through technical design, construction, tourism management, and maintenance. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal and comparative designs, involve multiple informants within each institution, and incorporate broader stakeholder perspectives to examine whether the proposed institutional interpretation gap, procedural versus substantive coordination, and substantively supportive versus intentionally communicative infrastructure distinctions remain useful across different cities, institutional arrangements, and infrastructure sectors.

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