

Dynamic Governance in City Branding: Case Study of Tabebuya in Bojonegoro Regency

Zanuba Safirotul Asca^{1*}, Ana Kumalasari², Ida Swasanti³

^{1,2,3} Department of Public Administration, Universitas Bojonegoro, Indonesia

Email: zanubaasca@gmail.com ; anakumala30@gmail.com ; ida.swasanti@gmail.com

Abstract. The “Sakura Bojonegoro” phenomenon represents the organic formation of a city identity through community participation in digital spaces. This study examines how the tabebuya planting program, initially implemented as an environmental policy by local government agencies, evolved into a distinctive city identity through the production and dissemination of visual content on Instagram and TikTok. The research also explores the dynamics of city communication and the government's capacity to respond to rapid social change in the digital era using the perspective of dynamic governance. A qualitative case study with a phenomenological approach was employed to capture the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, documentation of social media content, and relevant government documents, and were analysed using NVivo 12 Pro through thematic coding and data triangulation. The findings reveal that the “Sakura Bojonegoro” identity emerged primarily through citizen-generated content and community-driven digital engagement, with minimal direct government intervention. The government remained largely reactive and demonstrated limited readiness to manage rapidly evolving digital narratives, despite showing adaptive institutional responses in environmental policy implementation. This study highlights that community participation and social media have become significant drivers of city branding beyond formal governmental communication. These findings emphasize the importance of adaptive city branding strategies, collaborative governance, and responsive institutional capacities in addressing the emergence of city identities shaped by community initiatives in contemporary digital environments.

Keywords: Dynamic Governance; City Branding; Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines how the government is no longer the sole actor responsible for shaping city identity in the digital era. Traditional city branding perspectives position local governments as the primary agents in creating and communicating a city's image through planned strategies and coordinated promotional campaigns (Kavaratzis, 2004). However, the rapid development of digital technologies and social media has transformed this process, enabling citizens to independently create and disseminate narratives about their cities and contribute to the organic formation of urban identities. Consequently, city branding is increasingly influenced by bottom-up participation rather than solely by top-down governmental initiatives.

Several previous studies have highlighted the growing role of citizens and digital platforms in place branding. Hereźniak (2017) argued that citizens are important stakeholders in city

branding and proposed a participatory approach in which residents actively contribute to the creation and management of place brands. Acuti et al. (2019) further demonstrated that user-generated content on social media significantly influences perceptions of a city's image, particularly in the context of environmentally oriented place branding. Similarly, Taecharungroj (2019) showed that place brand identities can be inferred and shaped through user-generated content on social media platforms, indicating that digital narratives created by the public increasingly influence urban identity formation. In addition, Marwick (2015) emphasized that visual-sharing culture has become an important mechanism through which identities are created, negotiated, and disseminated in digital environments.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain in the literature. First, existing studies primarily focus on participatory branding, destination marketing, or social media's influence on place image, while limited attention has been paid to how a city identity may emerge unintentionally from a public policy initiative that was never designed as a branding strategy. Second, previous research continues to position governments as the central actors in branding processes, providing limited explanation of situations in which community-generated digital narratives dominate city identity formation. Third, there is still little understanding of how local governments respond when a city identity develops organically through social media without prior branding intentions, policy frameworks, or governance mechanisms. Finally, the role of visual-sharing platforms such as Instagram and TikTok in transforming ecological policies into city-branding phenomena remains underexplored.

To address these gaps, this study integrates two complementary theoretical perspectives: city branding theory (Kavaratzis, 2004) and dynamic governance theory (Neo & Chen, 2007). City branding theory explains how urban images are shaped through primary, secondary, and tertiary communication. However, the framework provides limited explanation for situations in which tertiary communication generated by citizens becomes the dominant force in constructing city identity. Therefore, dynamic governance theory is employed to examine how governments respond to rapidly evolving social phenomena. Neo and Chen (2007) argue that governments must develop the capacities to think ahead, think again, and think across in order to adapt effectively to changing environments. Combining these perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of both the formation of city identity and the government's capacity to respond to it.

A prominent example of this phenomenon is "Sakura Bojonegoro," where a tabebuya planting program originally implemented for ecological purposes by local government agencies

evolved into a viral city identity through community-generated content on Instagram and TikTok. Through the widespread circulation of photographs and videos depicting tabebuya-lined streets resembling Japanese cherry blossom landscapes, residents and visitors collectively constructed a new image of Bojonegoro that was neither planned nor formally promoted by the government. The phenomenon illustrates how city identity can emerge organically through digital participation and visual storytelling.

The novelty of this study lies in four aspects. First, it integrates city branding theory and dynamic governance theory to explain how city identity emerges through citizen-generated digital communication and how governments respond to such developments. Second, it examines the transformation of an ecological greening policy into a city-branding phenomenon, a process that has received limited scholarly attention. Third, it highlights the role of Instagram and TikTok as digital public spaces where urban identities are collectively constructed through visual-sharing practices. Fourth, by employing a phenomenological approach, this study captures residents' subjective experiences and explores how individual interpretations of the tabebuya landscape evolve into a shared collective identity.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine how the tabebuya planting program transformed into the "Sakura Bojonegoro" city identity through community participation in creating and disseminating visual content on social media and to analyze how the local government responded to this organically emerging city-branding phenomenon.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single-case study design and a phenomenological perspective to explore how the tabebuya planting program evolved into the "Sakura Bojonegoro" city identity through community participation on social media. This approach was selected because the study sought to understand the meanings, experiences, and social processes underlying the emergence of a community-driven city identity. The research was conducted in Bojonegoro Regency, East Java, particularly in areas where tabebuya trees were planted, including Jalan Panglima Sudirman, Jalan MH Thamrin, Jalan Mastrip, and Jalan Diponegoro. Ten informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in and knowledge of the phenomenon. These included representatives from the Public Works and Housing Agency, the Environment Agency, and the Culture and Tourism Agency, as well as community members who actively created and shared tabebuya-related content on Instagram and TikTok and individuals holding both supportive and critical perspectives toward the program. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant

observation, and documentation of social media content and relevant government records. The data were analysed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo 12 Pro, which facilitated data coding, categorisation, and pattern identification across multiple sources. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as from different categories of informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study employs two complementary frameworks to evaluate the effectiveness of the environmental policy program: Dynamic Governance and City Branding. Dynamic Governance, developed by Neo and Chen (2007), explains how governments enhance policy effectiveness through five capacities: Thinking Ahead, Thinking Across, Thinking Again, Adaptive Policy Making, and Institutional Learning. These dimensions assess the government's ability to anticipate future challenges, adopt best practices, continuously evaluate policies, respond adaptively to environmental change, and institutionalize organizational learning for sustainable governance. To complement this perspective, the study also applies the City Branding framework, which examines the contribution of environmental initiatives through four dimensions: City Identity, Strategic Communication, Public Involvement, and City Image & Attraction. This framework is consistent with Anholt (2007), who argues that a city's reputation is built through coherent public policies, stakeholder engagement, and a distinctive urban identity rather than promotion alone. By integrating these two frameworks, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of both governance capacity and the contribution of environmental policies to strengthening Bojonegoro's city branding. This integrated approach supports Kavaratzis (2004), who emphasizes that successful city branding is closely linked to strategic urban governance and the implementation of sustainable public policies.

The analysis begins with the indicators of the Dynamic Governance dimension.

Analysis of the Thinking Ahead indicator using the NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map demonstrates that the Bojonegoro Regency Government has adopted a proactive approach to environmental governance. The dominance of the "Adding Now" category indicates anticipatory policy actions, particularly the replacement of disease-prone Tabebuya trees with more resilient Pule trees to mitigate future ecological risks. This finding reflects the Thinking Ahead dimension of Dynamic Governance, which emphasizes governments' capacity to anticipate future challenges through forward-looking policies (Neo & Chen, 2007). The prominence of the "Aesthetics" and "Center" clusters further indicates that environmental initiatives are integrated into the Regional Spatial

Plan (RTRW) to strengthen urban identity and fulfill Green Open Space (RTH) targets. Periodic evaluations of plant conditions and community responses also demonstrate continuous policy refinement, consistent with the adaptive governance principle of organizational learning (Folke et al., 2005). These findings suggest that the Tabebuya Program not only supports environmental sustainability but also reinforces Bojonegoro's city branding through strategic and adaptive environmental governance.

adding	aesthetics	continuity	guarantee	observe	proposal	public	pule
	central	corridors	implement	planting	road	simultaneously	spaces
now	continue	enhance	locations	progresses	selecting	strategic	tabebuya

Figure 1. Tree Map of Thinking Ahead

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

The NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map analysis shows that the Thinking Across indicator is characterized by balanced collaboration, with communication and coordination emerging as the dominant themes. Interview findings indicate that the collaboration between the Public Works and Public Housing Agency (PKP Cipta Karya) and the Environmental Agency (DLH) follows a clear division of responsibilities, where PKP Cipta Karya manages the planting phase and DLH oversees maintenance. This reflects the Thinking Across principle of Dynamic Governance, which emphasizes learning and collaboration across organizational boundaries to improve policy implementation (Neo & Chen, 2007). The "Carried" and "Collaborated" themes further demonstrate effective intra-governmental coordination, while the absence of significant obstacles indicates a shared institutional commitment to supporting Bojonegoro's city branding and achieving Green Open Space (RTH) targets under the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW). However, collaboration remains limited to government agencies, with minimal involvement of the private sector and the community. This suggests that although bureaucratic coordination has been effective, broader collaborative governance, as emphasized by Ansell and Gash (2008), has not yet been fully realized.

carried	communication	major	significant
collaborated	coordination	obstacles	simple

Figure 2. Tree Map of Thinking Across

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

The NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map analysis shows that the Thinking Again indicator is dominated by the themes "Relevant," "Absorption," and "Aesthetic," indicating continuous policy evaluation to balance urban aesthetics with ecological sustainability. Although Tabebuya successfully established Bojonegoro's visual identity as the "Sakura of Bojonegoro," interviews with the Environmental Agency (DLH) revealed that its vulnerability to stem disease led the government to gradually replace it with Pule trees, which provide greater carbon absorption and environmental resilience. This finding reflects the Thinking Again dimension of Dynamic Governance, which emphasizes continuous policy review and adjustment based on implementation outcomes and changing conditions (Neo & Chen, 2007). The involvement of multiple agencies in revising planting strategies and reallocating tree species across strategic urban areas further demonstrates an institutionalized learning process. This supports Argyris and Schön's (1978) concept of double-loop learning, in which organizations do not merely correct operational errors but also reassess underlying policy assumptions to improve long-term effectiveness. Therefore, the evaluation of the Tabebuya Program represents a reflective governance process that strengthens the implementation of the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW) and enhances the quality of Green Open Space (RTH).

relevant	agencies	communicati	discuss	evaluations	lower	number	planting
					pollution	reduced	simple
	area	cooling	dust	immediately			tabebuya
absorption	authorities	decidedto	effect	improved	reduce	replace	temperature
aesthetics							trees

Figure 3. Tree Map of Thinking Again

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

The NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map analysis indicates that the Adaptive Policy Making dimension is characterized by the dominant themes "Evaluation," "Analysis," "Conducted," and "Adaptive," demonstrating that policy decisions are continuously adjusted based on empirical evidence. Interview findings reveal that periodic evaluations of the Tabebuaya Program identified the trees' susceptibility to stem disease, prompting the government to replace them with more resilient Pule trees to maintain both ecological and aesthetic functions. This finding reflects the Adaptive Policy Making principle of Dynamic Governance, which emphasizes policy flexibility and evidence-based decision-making in responding to changing environmental conditions (Neo & Chen, 2007). The integration of field evaluation into planting strategies further illustrates adaptive governance, where continuous monitoring and learning enable policies to evolve in response to uncertainty (Folke et al., 2005). Consequently, the government's adaptive approach supports the achievement of Green Open Space (RTH) targets under the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW) while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Tabebuaya Program.

evaluation	data	field	less	plants	reduce	regular
	effective	future	objectives	prepared	results	terms
analysis						usually
	evaluations	influenced	one	problem	surveys	well
conducted						

Figure 4. Tree Map of Adaptive Policy Making

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

The NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map analysis shows that the Institutional Learning dimension is dominated by the themes "Maintenance," "Analyzed," and "Data," indicating that organizational learning is driven by systematic field monitoring and evidence-based decision-making. Interviews with the Environmental Agency (DLH) and the Cipta Karya PKP Office revealed that maintenance activities generate operational data that are analyzed to identify planting constraints, synchronize inter-agency actions, and improve subsequent policy implementation. This finding reflects the Institutional Learning principle of Dynamic Governance, which emphasizes the institutionalization of knowledge and continuous learning to enhance governance capacity (Neo & Chen, 2007). The integration of maintenance data into future planning also aligns with Senge's (1990) concept of the learning organization, whereby organizations continuously acquire, share, and apply knowledge to improve performance. Accordingly, the institutionalization of field-based learning

has strengthened the implementation of the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW), supported the achievement of Green Open Space (RTH) targets, and sustained Bojonegoro's city branding through adaptive environmental governance.

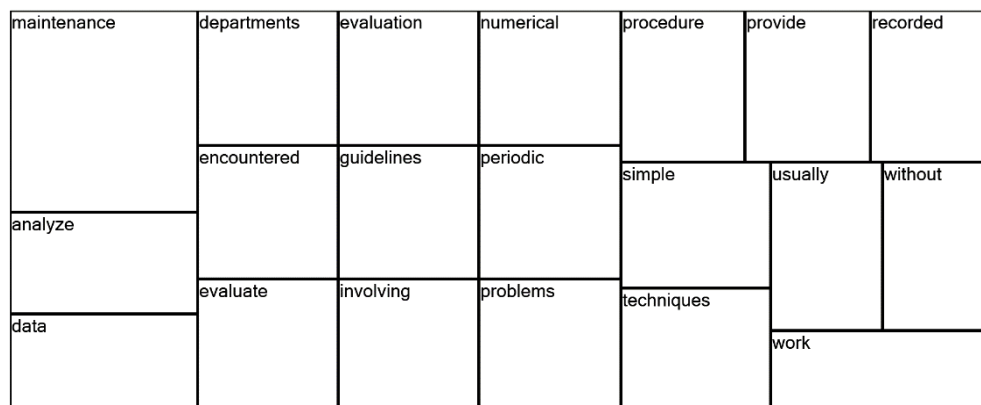


Figure 5. Tree Map of Institutional Learning

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

The following section presents the analysis of indicators under the City Branding dimension

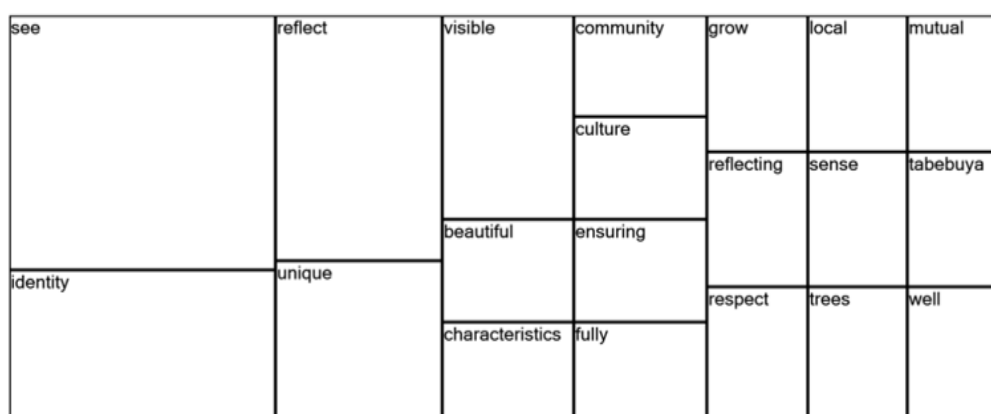


Figure 6. Tree Map of City Identity

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

The NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map analysis shows that the City Image dimension is dominated by the themes "See," "Visible," "Beautiful," "Unique," and "Characteristics," indicating that the Tabebuya Program has significantly enhanced Bojonegoro's visual identity. Community interviews confirmed that the blooming Tabebuya trees improved the aesthetic quality of public spaces and strengthened the perception of Bojonegoro as a modern and attractive city. This finding supports Anholt's (2007) view that a city's image is shaped by tangible public policies and residents' experiences rather than promotional activities alone. The emergence of the "*Sakura Bojonegoro*" identity further demonstrates how green infrastructure can create a distinctive place image, despite some public concerns that the visual concept reflects foreign rather than local

cultural values. This is consistent with Kavaratzis (2004), who argues that city branding is constructed through the interaction between physical urban development and public perception. Therefore, the Tabebuya Program has become a new visual icon that strengthens Bojonegoro's city image while enhancing its attractiveness and regional competitiveness.

media	beautiful	something	add	cooling	enthusias	fresh	good	infrastruc	introduc	layout
	content		attraction	created	enthusias	might	public	seems	seen	serious
new		spontaneou	beginning	creating	even	phenomen	show	streets	think	though
	impression		catching	developin	eye	popular	specific			
social		tabebuya						tourist		visual
	see		changes	done	flowers	providing	strategy	utilize		widely

Figure 7. Tree Map of Strategic Communication

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

The NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map analysis indicates that the Strategic Communication dimension is dominated by the themes "Social," "Media," "Content," "Beautiful," and "Impression," suggesting that the Tabebuya Program gained public recognition primarily through organic digital communication rather than formal government promotion. Interviews with the Culture and Tourism Office confirmed that no specific tourism campaign was implemented; instead, residents voluntarily shared photos and videos of the blooming Tabebuya trees, creating the viral "*Sakura Bojonegoro*" phenomenon on social media. This finding supports Kavaratzis (2004), who argues that city branding is shaped not only by official communication but also by public interpretation and everyday urban experiences. The active dissemination of user-generated content further reflects Kavaratzis' and Ashworth's (2005) concept of tertiary communication, in which citizens become co-creators of a city's brand through informal communication and social media engagement. Consequently, community participation in digital storytelling has significantly strengthened Bojonegoro's city branding and enhanced its public image.

The NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map analysis indicates that the Public Involvement dimension is dominated by the themes "Happy," "Beautiful," "Community," and "Cityscape," reflecting positive public responses and a growing sense of ownership toward the Tabebuya Program. Community interviews revealed that residents actively supported the program by preserving the trees and voluntarily sharing positive narratives on social media, despite the absence of a formal participation strategy. This finding supports Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), who argue that

successful city branding depends on citizens acting as co-creators of the city's identity through their everyday experiences and interactions. The emergence of voluntary participation also aligns with Arnstein's (1969) concept of citizen participation, which emphasizes that meaningful public involvement extends beyond formal consultation to active engagement in supporting public initiatives. Therefore, the Tabebuya Program demonstrates that aesthetic green infrastructure can foster community ownership, strengthen city branding, and contribute to the achievement of sustainable Green Open Space (RTH) development.

happy	see	beautiful	content	exist	moment	nice	options
		city	creating	lived	phenomenon	social	still
	something						
		cityscape	enthusiastic	many	pleased	temporary	unfortunately
new							
	area	community	execution	media	short	thorough	uploading

Figure 8. Tree Map of Public Involvement

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

The NVivo 12 Pro Tree Map analysis indicates that the City Image and Attraction dimension is shaped by the interaction between physical green infrastructure and community-generated digital content. The dominant themes "Contributes," "Content," "Media," "Social," and "Phenomenon" demonstrate that the Tabebuya Program enhanced Bojonegoro's visual attractiveness through the viral "*Sakura Bojonegoro*" phenomenon. Although the program was not initially designed as a tourism initiative, community interviews confirmed that residents actively created and shared social media content, strengthening the city's attractiveness. This finding supports Kavaratzis (2004), who argues that city image is constructed through the interaction between urban development and stakeholder perceptions. From a governance perspective, the replacement of Tabebuya with Pule trees illustrates the Thinking Again and Adaptive Policy Making dimensions of Dynamic Governance, where policies are continuously revised based on field evaluation and organizational learning (Neo & Chen, 2007). However, this study also reveals that city branding was driven primarily by tertiary communication, in which citizens, rather than government campaigns, became the main producers of the city's image (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). At the same time, community concerns that Tabebuya reflects a Japanese rather than a local identity highlight the importance of integrating local cultural values into future branding strategies. As Anholt (2007) argues, sustainable city branding requires a

strong alignment between physical development, authentic local identity, and long-term public policy.

contributes	city	see	advantage	cheapest	create	events	introduce	introduce	lively	local	moment
			already	combined	cultural	feel	opportunities	promote	quite	reached	seen
	created	social	attraction	communication	culture	festival	organized	short	spontaneous	study	sufficient
content	media	able	bit	contribute	easiest	government	period	significant	tabebu	upload	viral
		addition	blooming	contribute	especially	highlight	platform	significant			
aspects	phenomenon	additional	capitalize	contribute	event	increase	point	specifically	take	way	yes

Figure 9. Tree Map of City Image and Attraction

Source: Nvivo 12 Pro Data Processing

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the articulation of the Tabebuaya program in Bojonegoro Regency represents an accidental branding phenomenon triggered by the convergence of ecological policies and public digital participation. Fundamental findings show that the capacity for dynamic governance of local governments, manifested through technical adaptation and institutional learning, still operates within an administrative-functional scope and has not been fully integrated with a coherent city brand communication strategy. The “Sakura Bojonegoro” identity did not arise from a systematically designed primary communication scenario. Still, it emerged as a tertiary communication product determined by the spontaneous creativity of the community on digital platforms. This confirms a shift in authority in the construction of regional image, where public aesthetic perceptions can transcend formal bureaucratic narratives.

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