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# Revealing the New Identity Element to Construct Palembang City Branding

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#### Abstract

More than just selling, a city must be constructed as an image formation process, which is formed from a mental map created by local people that produces an original identity to make a good branding. This research aims to reveal a new element of city identity and produce a mapping process of forming a strong city identity based on the advantages of the city that can be used in perfecting the concept of city branding. The result shows that the natural appearance in this study refers to the appearance of the river and the surrounding area called "RIVERINE" which means the area around the river. These elements also become the identity of Palembang and can be one of the elements to construct a concept of city branding. The research's state-of-the-art findings are the new element to constructing the city identity of Palembang by revealing the role of the new element of city identity construction.

Keywords: Palembang; Riverine; City; Branding; Identity

## Abstrak

Lebih dari sekedar menjual, sebuah kota harus dikonstruksi sebagai proses pembentukan citra, yang terbentuk dari peta mental yang dibuat oleh masyarakat lokal yang menghasilkan identitas asli untuk membuat branding yang baik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap elemen baru identitas kota dan menghasilkan peta proses pembentukan identitas kota yang kuat berdasarkan keunggulan kota yang dapat digunakan dalam menyempurnakan konsep city branding Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kenampakan alam dalam penelitian ini mengacu pada kenampakan sungai dan daerah sekitarnya yang disebut "RIVERINE" yang artinya daerah sekitar sungai. Elemen-elemen tersebut juga menjadi identitas Palembang dan dapat menjadi salah satu elemen untuk membangun sebuah konsep city branding. Kecanggihan penelitian ini adalah temuan elemen baru untuk mengkonstruksi identitas kota Palembang dengan mengungkap peran elemen baru konstruksi identitas kota.

Kata Kunci: Palembang; Riverine; Kota; Merek; Identitas

## Introduction

Based on the historical aspect of the region, a city is a change from the development of a village. Socio-economic activities and the development of human resources in cities are increasing the speed of their development. Unlike the development of villages, cities will appear dense and diverse in various activities. The disparity between rural and urban areas can be observed from various points of view. For example, in terms of social and cultural interactions, there are various characteristics of urban communities; while close kinship patterns are superior for community interactions in villages, even neighbors who are not family members can be considered and equalized more than family. It is in harmony when viewed from the development orientation, where the village still uses traditional, traditional, and familial procedures while the city focuses on the modern orientation.

Govers & Go explains that many cities and regions around the world think they can change their city simply by changing their city identities, such as changing colors, new logo, new marketing campaign, and new management. However, it turns out it is not that simple. A good city image requires good communication. Communication is in charge of representing a city's promise through messages constructed from the city's social conditions and advantages (Govers, 2009).

The city is the culmination of the progress of the village development process, where which confirms the city as the pinnacle of a civilization (Mumford, 1938). Based on many factors why a city is a place of pride and hope, a city requires an identity construction that is in accordance with the characteristics of the city to be used as the basis for building city branding. According to Moilanen (2019), three essential concepts, also referred to in this city branding report, are related to brands: identity; images; and communication. Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the basic concept for creating city branding is always related to identity, image, and communication strategy. In communication science studies, branding is widely studied as part of the identity or symbolic embodiment of something, be it a company, product, individual, region, city, or even country.

The study of symbols or signs is part of the study of communication science, be it a brand as a message (message), a brand as a sign/symbol (semiotics), a brand as an identity, or them as an image representation (Public Relations). Branding is generally understood as expressive communication with strategic intent (Schultz, 2005). More than just selling, a city must be constructed as an image formation process, which is formed from a mental map created by local residents that produces an original identity and branding. Based on that, this research is needed and will be interesting. Nevertheless, they frequently ignored that people living in rural and urban settlements differ in their relationships with the physical environment and the local community and, therefore, in their level of identification with the place. This article relates to Belanche et al. (2021), which explores rural versus urban settlement as a fundamentally distinctive geographical divide.

Many cities in the world think that they can change their city just by changing the city's logo, such as changing color, tagline, new visualization, new marketing campaign, and new management. However, it turns out as not that simple. A good city image requires good communication. Communication represents the promise of a city through messages and is constructed from the social conditions and advantages of the city (Govers, 2009). The construction of a city identity is not easy, considering that the main challenge lies in creating a coherent image of the city protection in different cross-

areas of activities programmed using multiple target users. However, at the same time, the government must produce a strong and honest communication of the city image in synchronization of both advantages and potential aspects. This city identity is also related to the creative sector. From previous research, Montanari et al. (2021) explains that creative workers use city identity to understand what 'soft' factors they can harness from the city context. They filter city identity based on three recognition-related needs contingent on their work experience level. Studies emphasize that the creative city has been very dynamic. Some focus on the topic of the creative city as the creative space for its citizens (Michels, 2014; Motcanu, 2017) and the actors of the creative city (Baum, 2020; Borén & Young, 2017; Konno & Itoh, 2017).

In the case of Palembang city, it is necessary to carry out an identity construction process first. This study aims to link the *Riverine* elements that form the city identity with the city branding of Palembang. The construction must be based on the social aspects of the city's people. Finding elements of city formation that are in accordance with the realities of social and cultural conditions in Palembang is the essence of what this research wants to examine. The elements that shape the city's identity become the basic capital strength in combining the concepts of communication and marketing that can be combined to strengthen the identity and image of a city.

In a previous study, Evelina et al. (2018) revealed that Palembang, the oldest city in Indonesia, has so many historical destinations which are fascinating to visit. It means that in addition to having a potential destination for tourism, Palembang must reveal the community's original identity as the basic element shaping the city's image. Other research from Jokela (2020) concludes that the branding exercise is an open-ended process that seeks to assemble local assets, information, and people to constitute and manage the city's future. The research problems are that the identity of the city of Palembang has not been seen and that the process of model construction in making city branding that can be used by the government to formulate Palembang city branding has not been seen.

The context of this research focuses on tourism communication, where city identities are constructed to be the basis for making city branding which is a concept to market the city closely related to the tourism sector. In the tourism trend, city promotion is getting more manageable by relying on storytelling. It is how they share their experiences on social media, even by word of mouth. Mental maps in the daily interactions of local communities are needed to shape the reality of the city. Strengthening the city's brand and identity by highlighting its tourism potential will encourage the city's image as a tourism city (Arianis, 2021).

The main theory used in this research is Place Identity Theory (Govers, 2009). Govers and Go describe that place identities are constructed through historical, political, religious, and cultural discourses; through local knowledge, and influenced by power struggles. The term "place identity" has been used since the late 1970s (Proshansky, 1978). This theory emerged from the realm of environmental psychology due to the lack of concern among psychologists in studying the physical environment as an important factor in identity development

The essential aspect of shaping the identity of a place is its distinctiveness and appearance of a place (Phetsuriya & Heath, 2021). According to Lynch, the city's identity does not mean the resemblance of one object to another. Instead, it refers to the meaning of individuality which reflects its difference from other objects and its recognition as a separate entity. For Lynch, the image of a city is seen from the mental

picture of the city seen from the interaction of physical reality, existing culture, and basic psychological characteristics (Lynch, 1960).

Based on the theory of place identities by Govers and Go, five elements construct the city identity history, culture, religion, local knowledge and power struggle. In this research, the researchers are trying to reveal the new element to complete all five elements before based on the case of Palembang city called 'Riverine'. The research's state-of-the-art findings are the new element to construct the city identity of Palembang by revealing the role of the new element of city identity construction.

#### Method

This research used a qualitative approach to explore and understand the meaning of a number of individuals or groups of people who are considered to be from social or humanitarian problems (Cresswell, 2016). This research used a case study research method by Yin. According to Yin, a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates the case or cases conforming to the definition mentioned above by addressing the "how" or "why" questions (Yazan, 2015). The authors of case study research can help their readers understand the process followed in conducting the research by citing its methodological origins (Massaro et al., 2019).

There are several techniques to collect the data (Yin, 2002). Yin suggests the researchers use six evidentiary sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts, each of which has its own strengths and weaknesses. Based on six evidentiary sources, documentation is carried out through searching photos, books, archives, and dioramas from the SMB 2 museum. Interviews were conducted with religious leaders, cultural observers, and historians. Direct observations were made to the archaeological museum, SMB 2 museum, and houses of worship, and participant observations were carried out at various museums in Palembang. Meanwhile, data from physical artifacts were found during COVID-19 through a virtual tour of the museum.

To obtain the truth in the research, the researchers used triangulation techniques, source, time, and method. (Khairul Rahmat & Alawiyah, 2020). This study used a single case type with a single case holistic type in which only one case is in Palembang. The data analysis technique used in this study was Pattern Matching because this technique tends to analyze the empirical pattern obtained by the case study developed by the research proposition. The pattern matching used a structured research process, written up as the system planning based on detailed data from six evidentiary data source.

#### **Results and Discussion**

Place attachment and identity are related to nature in many aspects, such as climate, recreation, landscape, and familiarity (lack of change). Local people/citizens had contact with the natural appearance, especially during childhood. Nature has also contributed to forming meaningful bonds and positive values toward the natural environment (Hinds, 2008). Connection and empathy with nature are based on an enduring evolutionary relationship (Hinds and Sparks, 2008). The present study focuses on place identity because it is rooted in the psychological meanings of specific locations (Lalli, 1992) and enhances the personal relevance of place due to the individual's self-awareness of her / his belongingness to a social place (Belanche et al., 2017).

## **Recognizing the Palembang Identities Based on Place Identities Theory**

Based on the theory of place identities by Govers and Go, five elements that construct the city identity are history, culture, religion, local knowledge, and power struggle. The results can be related to the definition of historical value in the study by Wells (2010), who mentioned that historical value could be divided into two elements: association of the older built environment with historical events or people from the past and the ability to build fabric to convey information on past cultural practices, such as craftsmanship.

Discussion about the history of Palembang as the first element, starting from the history of 'Sriwijaya'. It began with the arrival of Dapunta Hyang with tens of thousands of troops from Minaga Tamwa by maritime route to the area drained by the Musi River and built a *wanua* to establish the kingdom of Sriwijaya. Continuing from the Sriwijaya empire to the Palembang kingdom and the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, it all started with the entry of refugees from the big kingdoms on the island of Java to Palembang via shipping routes. This illustrates that the geographical condition of the city of Palembang, which is located on the right and left of the Musi river, is the entrance to the history and culture of human civilization in the city of Palembang.

The second element is Religion. As part of South Sumatra Province, Palembang is a zero-conflict area in Indonesia. In connection with the city's long history, the inclusion of various religions in the life of a religious community is also an element that plays a role in forming the community's personality. This can be seen from the process of developing religious life in Palembang, with various religions present in this city. In accordance with the direction of the Governor of South Sumatra, he is trying to suppress conflict and maintain zero conflict, which is the principle of the religious Palembang community. The third element is culture. Based on this long history, culture in Palembang was the result of adaptation, assimilation, and acculturation processes of various cultures brought by the immigrants who settled in this city from time to time. The search for cultural elements focuses on the ethnic majority developed in Palembang, namely Malay, Chinese, Javanese, and Arabic.

Based on the description of the process of constructing the identity of Palembang and the values related to the condition of the people of Palembang related to the historical, cultural, and religious elements above, the researchers draw the value of Peace and Harmony.

## Revealing The New Element: Natural Appearance 'Riverine'

Indonesia is located in a very strategic geographical position because it is between two continents and two oceans (Rahmat, 2021). The natural environment appears as a fundamental aspect in determining place attachment (Brehm, 2006). The natural appearance was also often referred to as a landscape, which is everything that occurs naturally and is a natural event. In contrast to artificial appearances made by humans, natural appearances are of various types so that natural appearances can identify Indonesia's geographical conditions, which are identical to water or agrarian maritime areas. Of course, it will impact the life structure of people living in areas with natural features, for example, in the communication, social, cultural, and economic sectors. The natural features of the waters include waterfalls, rivers, swamps, seas, bays, straits, and oceans.

Geographical factors and natural appearances as natural elements have a significant role in forming civilization, in this case, a city. Natural factors as natural elements also provide the uniqueness and characteristics of each city in exploring

various other potentials and in harmony in supporting non-natural factors such as history that gives birth to culture and shapes the behavior and nature of the people who live in the area.

The city of Palembang is surrounded by landscapes like hills known as the Bukit Barisan. However, identically, the city of Palembang was famous for the natural appearance of the river, which plays a very important role in the formation of civilization nowadays in this city. The river is "Musi", the longest river in Sumatra, with various tributaries that stretch side by side with the community. Based on the historical element, it will be explained how the natural conditions of the waters in Palembang are witnesses of history, culture, and religion to create social conditions for the community.

The Musi River divides Palembang City into two parts, namely Seberang Ilir in the north and Seberang Ulu in the south. The Musi River, along with other rivers, forms a delta near Breech City. The springs are sourced in the Kepahiang area, Bengkulu. The Musi River is also called "Batanghari Sembilan", which means nine major rivers. The meaning of the nine major rivers is the Musi River along with the eight major rivers that empty into the Musi river. The eight rivers are the Komering River, Rawas River, Leko River/Batang Hari Leko, Lakitan River, Kelingi River, Lematang River, Rupit River, and Ogan River.

The city of Palembang was present and developed, starting with the existence of the river as a source of the early civilization. History also shows some evidence that the emergence of civilization in various parts of the world is closely related to the existence of rivers. The Musi River is the estuary of various rivers flowing from Bukit Barisan, both in South Sumatra, upstream Bengkulu, and upstream Jambi. It can be said that the Musi River gave birth to Srivijaya.

From the economic sector, the Musi River is a witness to the triumph of the proto-Sriwijaya trade. Its role in triumphing maritime history in Asia began with the rule of the Sriwijaya Kingdom from the 7th to the 13th centuries. The Musi River also witnessed the progress and collapse of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate from the 17th century to the 19th century. It continued to witness the glory of the VOC of the Dutch Colony and Indonesian independence. The results can be related to the definition of historical value in the study of Jeremy C. Wells (Wells, 2010), who mentioned that historical value could be divided into two elements: association of the older built environment with historical events or people from the past and the ability to build fabric to convey information on past cultural practices, such as craftsmanship.

In the case of Palembang, the Musi River influences the community's daily life from time to time, so they choose to live on the banks of the river. The livelihoods of the people along the Musi River are mostly fishers, traders, and day laborers, so the modes of water transportation that are busy going back and forth on the waterfront of the Musi River are boats and barges. This environmental aspect in natural appearance is also related to the Looking at the *Talang Tuwo Inscription* script. It will appear that the spirit of arrangement environment has been carried out since old times. When everything was still green, the forest was still a lot, the river was still preserved, and space was still so loose, the layout was studied and considered by the king. The Leadership of His Majesty Sri Jayanasa had taken into account everything and already showed the phenomena that would occur. The messages on the *Talang Tuwo inscription* script become interesting because it is written systematically, specifically about the environment living and spatial planning (Yenrizal, 2018).

This condition led to a transformation process that was not in accordance with the natural and cultural conditions of the river and decreased attention to riverbank areas. Subsequently, it decreased the quality of life in riverside areas. The character of the river city from the urban river begins to fade and disappear. For decades, people in the archipelago have lived in prosperity because they have a harmonious relationship with nature; this also happened in Palembang in the past. The meaning of harmony is not only in the relationship among humans but also between humans and nature. The harmonious relationship between humans and nature is the superior human character of the Indonesian nation, a country with abundant natural wealth, which is not limited to mastering science and technology like other nations.

By restoring human wisdom to nature and making natural conditions or natural appearances the identity of the city, it is hoped that it can be an element to create city branding and grow various concepts to preserve nature. This research refers to the Place identity theory, where Govers and Go do not emphasize Geographical elements or Natural Appearances. Based on this research, natural appearances are the common thread of various elements forming city identity, namely history, culture, and religion.

The natural appearance in this study refers to the appearance of the river and the surrounding area or it can also be called "RIVERINE," which means the area around the river. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Riverine means living or situated on the banks of a river. Based on previous research related to the process of forming city identity, the different natural appearances of each city have not been seen as factors that form the identity of a place/city.

Through this study, the researchers looked at geographical factors or the condition of the Riverine Natural Appearance in Palembang. A wide river rich in river animal ecosystem, clear water, and calm currents is a gift from God for a city. The harmonious relationship between humans and nature shapes the character of the Indonesian nation, which is open, egalitarian, courageous, cooperative, and godly. It is the characters that are able to give birth to great humans.

The natural appearance of the Riverine in Palembang is closely related to the Musi River. The Musi River has not only been important in the past, but its role is even more important in the future. The natural wealth and various cultures of the Indonesian people along the Musi River flow into and develop to this day are still widely found and have become one of the cradle civilizations that gave birth to water culture (Musi Culture). The development of water culture, tourism potential, settlements, and transportation is valuable in addition to the enormous challenges of the rapid process of environmental degradation.

The government has been carrying out various maintenance of the Musi river, and that must be continued periodically and continuously. In this case, the community must also be aware of their role in maintaining the river by reviving the identity of the city of Palembang, especially in the placement of elements of natural appearance, namely the river as an important element.

The Environment of Natural Appearance and human values, on the one hand, determined, shaped and completed the shape of the early cities in the world. Mesopotamian cities, the Nile valley, the Indus River valley, Greece and Italy, Mexico, Guatemala, the Andes Mountain, the Arabian Peninsula, Java and Sumatra, and other early cities in Indonesia were the result of these factors. The shape of contemporary cities cannot be separated from the influence of the policies of the city authorities and

the behavior of the people of their time. Cities in the world grow and develop to form a physical spatial structure based on the Natural Appearance of each city.

Some urban experts state that urban design results from decision-makers, both legal and state, who interact with elements of the surrounding natural environment. Thus, in this study, the researchers added the "Riverine" Natural Appearance element, which is expected to make Palembang city's identity depict the condition's authenticity. Palembang must be immediately returned to its initial identity as a city with the largest river in Sumatra, namely the Musi river with all its history, culture, and rolse in the lives of the people of Palembang city from the past to date.

From several previous studies on Palembang city branding, researchers focused on tangible elements and did not consider intangible assets. The difficulty in finding the right brand for Palembang is due to the paradox of abundance. So many nicknames or designations for this city confuse determining the appropriate concept as a city identity. As a result, the possible terms that can be taken are only vague nicknames such as Pempek City (typical food), Musi city (name of the river), city of a thousand shop houses (building condition), river city (because the river flows through), etc.

## **Discussion**

This research reveals implications for the development of theories, especially regarding city identity. The results are highly expected to strengthen the place identity theory by Govers and Go. The *Riverine* elements as the Natural Appearance can be added as one of the elements that can strengthen the process of city identity construction. This means that this research's findings or novelty are the divergence of thought in the process of exploring various possible solutions to generate creative ideas. In the following, the researchers summarize the research novelty in a "River City Identity Model" chart where the researcher has added an element of the Natural Appearance factor, which is the result of research searches from observations, interviews, discussions, and library searches, and data. Related to the title, the model can provide implications for previous theories and contribute ideas from future studies.

This model can also be applied to other cities similar to Palembang. This concept can be used as a value for the people of Palembang to strengthen their identity. It is constructed through elements of the Place Brand Identity theory by Govers &Go (history, culture, and religion). The result is shown in figure 1 below:

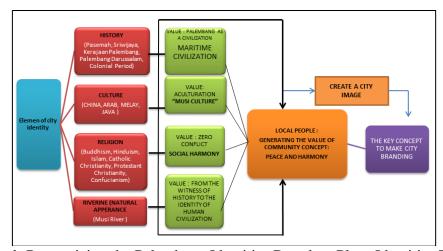


Figure 1. Recognizing the Palembang Identities Based on Place Identities Theory

New elements were considered to become the basic elements that have not been maximally explored in the search for the city identity construction to shape a city branding. The elements of Natural Appearance, which in this case is the existence of rivers as Natural Appearances in the city of Palembang, were not a thing to be considered and raised in the formation of branding in accordance with the identity of the Palembang city. This research, however, revealed new elements that provide implications for the development of theories, especially the Place Branding Theory by Govers and Go. The new element Riverine (Natural Appearance), can complete the previous element, such as history, culture, religion, and local people. In the following, the researchers summarize the research novelty in a "River City Identity Model":

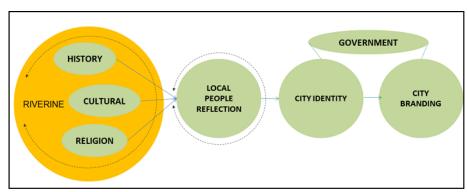


Figure 2. The Research Novelty "River City Identity Model"

#### **Conclusion**

In the design of Palembang city branding, the river becomes the basic consideration element in becoming the basic material for making the right branding concept. The appearance of nature, in this case, the Musi river, contributes to rethinking the Palembang city branding concept that was created years ago. In fact, the river has a very large meaning and role in shaping the city of Palembang from the megalithic period to the post-independence period. This study regarding the identity of the city also has a research limitation as this research was only for specific case studies related to Palembang city. The novelty of this research is also limited to the elements of the natural appearance of the riverine, which is indeed the advantage of the city. The opportunities for further research will certainly be possible, considering that every city in the world has the advantage of its natural appearance. In other words, the development and sustainability of research in cities with natural features such as mountains, beaches, seas, and others are needed to produce new concepts of natural features to communicate superior and genuine city branding.

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