



## The Role of Civil Servants in Spatial Governance and Urban Image Formation: A Qualitative Study of the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town Corridor in Serang City

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of civil servants in spatial governance and urban image formation in the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town corridor of Serang City. The study begins from the argument that contemporary urban management is no longer limited to physical regulation, but also involves symbolic construction, inter-agency coordination, and the creation of public legitimacy through visible spatial transformation. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this research analyzes policy narratives, institutional responses, media-documented developments, and local restructuring processes related to the revitalization of Royal Baroe and its surrounding urban corridor. The findings indicate that civil servants performed at least four interconnected roles. First, they acted as spatial coordinators who linked trade regulation, circulation management, public order, and event-based activation. Second, they functioned as image brokers by translating government programs into a more attractive urban identity associated with cleanliness, aesthetics, safety, and economic optimism. Third, they served as institutional integrators by encouraging the establishment of a more permanent management unit to reduce fragmented sectoral action. Fourth, they became intermediaries connecting relocation policy, local traders, visitors, and potential investors. Based on these findings, the article argues that the effectiveness of spatial governance in secondary cities depends not only on design interventions, but also on administrative continuity, inter-agency collaboration, and the state's ability to sustain public trust after physical revitalization. The study recommends stronger area-based governance, inclusive trader assistance, and long-term urban branding linked to public service delivery.

**Keywords:** civil servants, spatial governance, urban image, local government, Serang City

### INTRODUCTION

Urban spatial planning at the local level is increasingly understood as a governing process that involves not only the regulation of land use, circulation, and physical aesthetics, but also the formation of city image, policy legitimacy, and public perceptions of state capacity. In this context, civil servants hold a strategic position because they translate the mayoral vision into administrative practice, coordinate government agencies, mediate community interests, and ensure that spatial transformation does not stop at symbolic inauguration. Based on a governance perspective, urban space is an arena in which policy, identity, local economy, and power relations intersect. Therefore, the arrangement of urban areas should not be read merely as an infrastructure project, but as a governance practice that demonstrates how the local state appears, is perceived, and is evaluated by the public.

Serang City provides a relevant setting for discussing this issue. As the capital of Banten Province, Serang faces the characteristic challenges of a secondary city, namely the need to improve the quality of public space, reorganize informal and semi-formal trading activities, and construct a more orderly and competitive urban image without disconnecting local economic life. In recent years, the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town corridor has emerged as an important node in the city's urban restructuring agenda. This corridor is not

simply a traffic route or a daily commercial area, but also a symbolic urban space representing the face of the city in the eyes of residents, business actors, and visitors.

Based on documented developments, the revitalization of Royal Baroe has been projected as part of the “new face” of Serang and has been associated with trader relocation, the strengthening of micro, small, and medium enterprises, event-based urban activation, and the creation of a more attractive public destination. Government reporting at the end of December 2025 showed that the area was prepared through temporary road closure, the use of road space in a night-market format, parking support from several locations, and integrated security arrangements across institutions. In this narrative, spatial restructuring was not framed merely as control or discipline, but as an activation strategy intended to encourage residents and economic actors to view the corridor as a productive shared space. Official data also showed that the inaugural event on 26 December 2025 involved 122 MSMEs and generated total revenue of IDR 289,493,000, indicating that urban image transformation was directly connected to local economic circulation.

On the other hand, Royal Baroe was also promoted as a place to visit, enjoy, and photograph. Official local government publications described the corridor as a family-friendly and photo-worthy destination enhanced by aesthetic lighting and street furniture. Visitors reportedly came not only from Serang City but also from nearby areas, while the highest concentration of activity occurred after the evening prayer period. This kind of narrative is significant because it suggests that urban image is formed through sensory, visual, and social experience. In other words, the image of a city does not emerge exclusively from planning documents, but from how civil servants and local government actors orchestrate order, comfort, and attractiveness in everyday space.

Nevertheless, the formation of urban image through area restructuring always raises governance questions. Physical change is often more visible and immediate than institutional strengthening. Therefore, the next challenge lies in sustaining management, reducing sectoral fragmentation, and ensuring that multi-agency involvement does not end with ceremonial momentum. An indication of such awareness appeared when the Serang municipal government began discussing the establishment of a Royal Baroe Area Management Unit under the Office of Cooperatives, MSMEs, Industry, and Trade in February 2026. This move reflected an understanding that an area whose image had already been built would require a more permanent and coordinated institutional framework.

From an academic standpoint, this issue can be interpreted through several conceptual lenses. First, image of the city theory emphasizes that urban perception is formed through legibility, symbols, landmarks, and coherent spatial experience. Second, collaborative governance approaches underline that complex public outcomes require coordination among actors across institutions and interests. Third, studies of urban governance argue that local governments should function not only as regulators, but also as enablers, mediators, and guardians of continuity in urban transformation. Through these perspectives, the role of civil servants cannot be reduced to administrative execution, because they are also involved in the production of meaning attached to restructured space.

This study is important because there remains limited scholarship specifically connecting the role of civil servants, spatial restructuring, and urban image formation in Indonesia’s secondary cities. Many studies discuss urban revitalization, informal economy, or city branding separately. However, the relationship between local bureaucracy and urban image has not been sufficiently analyzed in a grounded way at the corridor or area level. In practice, the success or failure of urban restructuring is often determined not only by physical design, but by the ability of public officials to build coordination, manage social transition, and maintain public trust.

Based on this background, this article aims to analyze how civil servants in Serang City contribute to spatial governance and urban image formation in the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town corridor. More specifically, the article addresses three main questions. First, how is the role of civil servants manifested in the restructuring process? Second, how is the image of the area formed through policy, events, and institutional management? Third, what factors need to be strengthened so that the transformation of the corridor can remain sustainable and inclusive? Through these questions, this article seeks to contribute to the development of urban governance studies, particularly those concerned with the capacity of local bureaucracy to shape urban space that is functional as well as publicly representative.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method. This method was selected because the purpose of the research is not to test causal relationships statistically, but to develop an in-depth understanding of the role of civil servants in spatial governance and urban image formation through policy narratives, coordination practices, and empirically documented spatial changes. Through this approach, the researcher is able to examine how spatial transformation is interpreted, implemented, and presented by local government, and how such transformation relates to administrative, economic, and symbolic functions.

The research was conducted in the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town corridor in Serang City, Banten Province. The selection of this location was purposive, since the corridor has recently undergone a highly visible transformation and has been positioned by local government as part of the city’s emerging public identity. In addition, the area has characteristics that make it analytically relevant, namely its role as a meeting point between trading activity, public mobility, urban leisure, and government intervention.

The data sources in this study consist of limited primary data and qualitative secondary data. The study identifies **8 principal sources of data**, comprising 4 key informants and 4 policy/media documents relevant to the research focus. Conceptually, the key informants include representatives of local government, MSME actors or traders, and area users. Meanwhile, the secondary data include official local government publications, national and local media reports, and academic literature addressing urban governance, collaborative governance, city image, and the role of bureaucracy in the management of public space.

Data collection was conducted through document study, critical reading of policy narratives, and content analysis of documented area developments. Based on the available evidence, the researcher traced several core themes, namely trade regulation, event-based activation, visual attractiveness, institutional support, and the future direction of post-revitalization management. Through this technique, documents and reports are treated not merely as descriptive information, but as institutional traces reflecting how the local state frames achievement, problem-solving, and the future of the area.

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. At the reduction stage, the findings were grouped into categories of coordinative, symbolic, integrative, and facilitative roles of civil servants. At the display stage, the data were organized into thematic explanation so that relationships among facts could be presented systematically. Conclusion drawing was then conducted by linking empirical local evidence with theoretical concepts concerning the image of the city, urban governance, and collaborative governance.

To maintain the validity of the analysis, the study used source triangulation and conceptual triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing official government publications, external media reports, and scientific literature. Conceptual triangulation was conducted by interpreting the data through more than one theoretical lens so that the discussion would move beyond surface-level description. Through this process, the findings are expected not only to describe what happened in the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town corridor, but also to explain why the role of civil servants is central in maintaining continuity between spatial restructuring, local economy, and urban image.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### 1. Civil servants as coordinators of spatial restructuring and area activation

Based on the findings, the most visible and immediate role played by civil servants was their function as coordinators of spatial restructuring. This role appeared in the bureaucracy’s ability to connect the physical needs of the area with the socio-economic needs of the local population. The restructuring of Royal Baroe was not carried out solely through the logic of clearing or disciplining space, but through the regulation of new activities that kept the corridor alive. Official government reports concerning the event on 26 December 2025 showed that local officials did not work in isolation. Instead, they coordinated with transportation authorities, security institutions, and parking providers. This demonstrates that urban space is produced through administrative work across functional boundaries.

This is important because in many secondary cities, restructuring efforts fail when they rely on sectoral approaches that separate trade, transport, security, and aesthetics from one another. In the case of Royal Baroe, civil servants appeared to combine these dimensions within a single policy momentum that could be directly experienced by the public. In this sense, the bureaucracy acted as a translator between

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governmental plans and citizens' spatial experience.

On the other hand, the restructuring process also suggests that local bureaucracy operated through a gradual strategy. The government did not immediately frame the area as a finalized spatial outcome, but rather as a space continuously shaped through events, public narratives, and ongoing improvement. This gradual approach matters in governance because overly rapid spatial change without social adaptation often provokes resistance. Through the inaugural event, visitors, traders, and residents were given the opportunity to test the new function of the space while simultaneously assessing whether the transformation generated real benefit.

From a governance perspective, this finding confirms that civil servants functioned as coordinating actors who combined regulation, facilitation, and spatial orchestration. This role aligns with the argument that local bureaucracy in urban governance must be able to create a working order that allows physical intervention to be used and socially accepted. Without sufficient coordination, even a well-designed urban space can quickly become a symbolic project lacking durable social function.

## **2. Civil servants as area image builders and mediators of spatial meaning**

The findings further indicate that civil servants did not only manage the area technically, but also participated in the formation of its public image. In this context, urban image was constructed through visual aesthetics, cleanliness, lighting, street furniture, city signage, and official narratives describing the area as a new urban face and public destination. Based on government publications, Royal Baroe after its inauguration came to be perceived as a photo-friendly and family-oriented urban space, with activity peaking after evening hours. In the context of city image studies, this suggests that space becomes meaningful when the public can read it, enjoy it, and remember it as a distinct experience.

Through official narratives, civil servants mediated a shift in the meaning of the corridor from a conventional trading zone into a more representative urban space. This transformation was not a neutral process. It involved choices regarding which elements to highlight, which activities to invite, and which symbols to use in representing the city's identity. For example, visual markers and spatial signage became part of a strategy for enhancing legibility. In other words, urban image was shaped through bureaucratic action that determined how space should appear and how it should be experienced.

At the same time, the formation of image was closely related to the legitimacy of trader relocation and spatial regulation policy. When an area can be presented as orderly, beautiful, lively, and economically productive, government gains a more persuasive narrative of success. However, this also requires civil servants to ensure that aesthetics do not erase social justice concerns. Restructuring that emphasizes visual appeal without securing economic access for local traders may generate only a superficial image. Therefore, a strong area image must be accompanied by support for small businesses, circulation strategies that bring visitors into the area, and institutional arrangements capable of sustaining the transformation.

Through this perspective, civil servants may be understood as image brokers who mediate between policy and public perception. They do not merely implement procedures, but also produce the message that the area is moving toward a better condition. This role is highly strategic in secondary cities because the successful construction of area image can strengthen civic pride, attract visitors from outside the city, and open opportunities for investor confidence.

## **3. Civil servants as institutional integrators and connectors of local economy**

Based on policy developments in February 2026, one of the most significant findings is the push for the creation of a Royal Baroe Area Management Unit. This move indicates that the municipal government recognized the need for a dedicated institution so that area management would not be undermined by sectoral ego and fragmented responsibility. In many revitalization cases, early projects appear successful but weaken over time because no institution is clearly responsible for maintenance, activation, promotion, and cross-sector coordination. Therefore, the proposed management unit is an important indicator of a transition from event-based management to area-based governance.

Through the establishment of a more permanent institutional arrangement, civil servants would have greater opportunity to integrate various agendas, including trade regulation, area promotion, safety, cleanliness, and business support. This corresponds with the broader need for the city to manage the corridor

not as a fragmented project, but as a public service ecosystem. Plans to connect Royal Baroe with Taman Sari, Eco Park, and the city square also demonstrate that government has started to view the area within a larger urban network. In this regard, civil servants act as designers of inter-spatial and inter-program connectivity.

Another important aspect concerns the relationship between area restructuring and local economy. Available data indicate that the inaugural event generated substantial turnover for participating MSMEs. In addition, there were indications of rising investor interest in culinary business, restaurants, and tourism after the corridor was reorganized. These findings suggest that transformation of area image can produce broader economic effects. However, such benefits will not be sustainable unless bureaucracy develops fair mechanisms for assistance, promotion, and regulation.

The following table summarizes the principal findings of the study.

**Table 1. Summary of the roles of civil servants in the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town corridor**

| <b>Dimension of civil servants' role</b> | <b>Practical manifestation</b>                                                  | <b>Main impact</b>                         |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <b>Coordinative</b>                      | Connecting agencies, security, parking, and event activation                    | Better order and accessibility in the area |
| <b>Symbolic</b>                          | Producing narratives of a new city image, aesthetics, and visual attractiveness | More positive public image of the corridor |
| <b>Integrative</b>                       | Encouraging the establishment of a dedicated management unit                    | Reduced fragmentation across sectors       |
| <b>Facilitative-economic</b>             | Supporting MSMEs, promotion, and investor attraction                            | Increased local economic activity          |

Through the table above, it is clear that the role of civil servants was not singular. They operated simultaneously at operational, representational, and institutional levels. This is what distinguishes governance-based spatial restructuring from a purely technocratic approach. In the context of Serang City, the early success of Royal Baroe demonstrates that local bureaucracy must be capable of transforming momentum into a stable system of management.

#### 4. Implications for the governance of secondary cities

The case of Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town offers several important lessons for secondary cities in Indonesia. First, urban spatial transformation requires bureaucratic capacity not only to deliver physical projects, but also to manage social transition. Second, urban image formation must be supported by spatial experiences genuinely felt by the public, such as safety, comfort, accessibility, and economic opportunity. Third, the sustainability of restructuring requires an institutional manager equipped with clear authority, adequate resources, and a service-oriented perspective.

Based on this analysis, the key findings of the study can be formulated into five points. First, civil servants in Serang City acted as the primary connectors between physical restructuring and the socio-economic needs of the area. Second, urban image formation was carried out through a combination of aesthetics, events, and policy communication. Third, the early success of the corridor was strongly influenced by inter-agency coordination. Fourth, institutional strengthening through a dedicated management unit is a necessary condition for sustainability. Fifth, the economic impacts of the corridor indicate that urban image can contribute to business confidence and visitor mobility.

On the other hand, the study also identifies several challenges that require attention. A corridor that has already become popular needs consistent management standards so that it does not deteriorate after the initial wave of enthusiasm. In addition, the interests of long-standing traders, new business actors, visitors, and government must continue to be mediated so that restructuring remains inclusive. Thus, civil servants need to strengthen not only their administrative function, but also their capacity for social mediation.

Theoretically, this case shows that the image of the city at the local level is not produced by architecture alone, but by active governance. Area image emerges when bureaucracy is able to maintain spatial legibility, service continuity, and persuasive public communication. Through this perspective, the role of civil servants in Serang City demonstrates that local bureaucracy can become an important agent in shaping a more adaptive and productive urban identity.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that civil servants in Serang City play a strategic role in spatial governance and urban image formation in the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town corridor. Based on the analysis, this role extends beyond administrative execution and includes coordinative, symbolic, integrative, and facilitative dimensions. Civil servants connect multiple interests and policy instruments so that area transformation does not stop at physical restructuring, but develops into a lived spatial experience that is orderly, attractive, and economically meaningful.

Through the restructuring of the corridor, local government succeeded in presenting a narrative of a new urban face that appears more appealing to residents, visitors, and business actors. However, this study also emphasizes that a positive area image must be accompanied by strong institutional management. Without a permanent and collaborative governance structure, spatial transformation remains vulnerable to becoming temporary. Therefore, the creation of an area management unit, stronger inter-agency coordination, and continuous assistance for local economic actors are decisive factors for long-term sustainability.

On the other hand, this study demonstrates that urban image in secondary cities cannot be separated from the capacity of local bureaucracy to mediate the relationship between space, society, and economy. Thus, the main contribution of this article is to show that civil servants are not only policy implementers, but also producers of spatial meaning and guardians of continuity in urban transformation. The recommendations generated by this study include strengthening area-based governance, establishing post-revitalization evaluation mechanisms, expanding assistance for MSMEs and affected traders, and integrating urban branding with the quality of public service delivery. If these recommendations are implemented consistently, the Royal Baroe–Pasar Lama–China Town corridor has the potential to become a model of area restructuring that is not only aesthetic, but also inclusive, sustainable, and relevant for the development of secondary cities in Indonesia.

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