



Governing the Transition to a Gastronomy City: Local Government Roles, Collaborative Governance, and Institutional Challenges in Padang, Indonesia

Vella Gusti Rizalda¹, Muhammad Takdir², Annisa Fitri^{3*}, Riswanto Bakhtiar⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Department of Public Administration, Universitas Ekasakti, Padang, Indonesia

* Corresponding author: fitriannisa@unespadang.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The transition from culinary recognition to an internationally credible gastronomy city requires more than destination branding; it requires institutions able to coordinate stakeholders, strengthen small enterprises, and preserve living food heritage. This study examines how Padang City's Tourism Office performs these functions, which implementation barriers constrain them, and what governance arrangements could support an inclusive gastronomy-city agenda. Using an exploratory qualitative case-study design, the research draws on eight purposively selected interview participants across seven professional categories, field observations, and documentary evidence collected in Padang during November 2025–May 2026. Publicly accessible institutional documents released after fieldwork are used only for contextual updating, not as interview findings. Using role theory and collaborative governance as complementary analytical lenses, the study identifies four interdependent governmental roles—planner, facilitator, promoter, and coordinator—and five constraints: institutional transition, limited gastronomy literacy, uneven micro- and small-enterprise capabilities, weak spatial coverage of culinary assets, and undifferentiated competition. The analysis proposes an institutional-conversion perspective in which strategic commitments must be translated into coordinated implementation, enterprise capability, heritage-sensitive place-making, and monitorable public value. Padang's 2027 UNESCO Creative Cities Network ambition is therefore treated as a policy objective, not as an achieved designation. The study contributes a role-to-capability governance framework and a set of measurable policy priorities; the conclusions are qualified by the scope and depth of the qualitative evidence.

Keyword:

gastronomy city; local government; collaborative governance; cultural heritage; Padang; tourism development

³fitriannisa@unespadang.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive tourism economy, food is no longer merely a supporting service for visitors. Culinary practices mediate how destinations communicate history, identity, social relations, and everyday cultural knowledge. Yet a city rich in famous dishes is not automatically a well-governed gastronomy destination. Translating culinary reputation into sustainable urban development requires public institutions to connect cultural custodians, producers, micro- and small enterprises, destination planners, educational institutions, residents, and visitors. Work on food and place demonstrates how local cuisine can support perceived authenticity (Sims, 2009), while destination research links local food experiences to visitor attraction (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Neither relationship, however, establishes that city-level recognition alone generates equitable local benefits.

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) treats creativity as a cross-cutting driver of sustainable economic, social, cultural, and environmental development. Its mission stresses intercity learning, public-private-civil-society partnerships, cultural participation, and the integration of creative activity into urban policy (UNESCO, 2026). Accordingly, an aspiration to become a UNESCO City of Gastronomy should be evaluated as a governance project rather than a promotional title. A meaningful assessment asks whose culinary knowledge is represented, which businesses gain access to support, which neighborhoods benefit from investment, and how commitments are monitored beyond the application process.

Padang, the capital of West Sumatra, provides a consequential setting

for examining this challenge. Minangkabau culinary traditions—including rendang, sate Padang, and diverse gulai preparations—are integral to the city's public identity and broader Indonesian food culture. The case evidence describes a municipal agenda to move from an earlier creative-economy emphasis on performing arts toward gastronomy, using heritage revitalization, food-related events, enterprise assistance, and intersectoral partnerships. This shift entails changes in the meaning of tourism development: heritage preservation and everyday livelihoods must be considered alongside visitor spending and city image.

Public documentation supports the existence of this transition while clarifying its chronology. The Padang municipal government discussed gastronomy-oriented development of the Old Town in July 2025 (Padang City Government, 2025) and subsequently announced a reassessment of the city's leading creative-economy subsector in early 2026 (Padang City Government, 2026a). After the original fieldwork period, Universitas Negeri Padang reported June 2026 collaboration on a Gastronomy Roadmap for 2026–2030 (Universitas Negeri Padang, 2026). In August 2026, the municipality reported progress through the first national screening stage for the UCCN 2027 nomination process (Padang City Government, 2026b). These later events describe an evolving policy context; they do not constitute evidence that UNESCO has conferred a designation or that the reported programs have already delivered measurable social outcomes.

Existing scholarship offers several relevant, but incompletely connected, perspectives. Role theory explains the gap between expected and enacted conduct associated with an institutional position

(Biddle, 1986). Collaborative-governance research explains the conditions under which public agencies and societal actors can pursue shared objectives across organizational boundaries (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012). Tourism policy-network work, in turn, warns that collaboration can privilege well-connected stakeholders while excluding wider communities (Dredge, 2006). Contemporary food-tourism research identifies destination sustainability, living culinary heritage, local livelihoods, and governance as intertwined concerns (Campos Quezada & Castillo Ortiz, 2024; Fernández & Irimia-Diéguez, 2025; Rijal et al., 2026). What remains less clear in Padang is how local government roles become operational institutional capabilities and where that conversion encounters bottlenecks.

This study therefore addresses three questions: (1) how is the Padang City Tourism Office's role in the gastronomy-city agenda enacted across planning, facilitation, promotion, and coordination; (2) which institutional, economic, and cultural barriers limit implementation; and (3) what governance arrangements would link the city's creative-city ambition to inclusive and assessable public outcomes? The contribution is a theoretically grounded account of the transition from culinary promotion to the institutional governance of a gastronomy destination, with fieldwork and later documentary developments distinguished throughout.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

From food products to a sustainable gastronomy ecosystem

Gastronomy destinations combine tangible assets, such as markets, kitchens, restaurants, heritage buildings, and local food products, with intangible assets, such as recipes, preparation skills, food rituals, narratives, and intergenerational knowledge. Under a product-oriented

model, government may count events, vendor booths, or promotional impressions. An ecosystem-oriented model instead investigates whether these interventions generate durable entrepreneurial competence, cultural continuity, local procurement, and visitor experiences that reflect place. Sims (2009) shows why perceived authenticity and food provenance matter; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) emphasize the relevance of local food to destination attraction. These ideas are useful, but neither implies that every form of commercial expansion protects cultural ownership or distributes benefits equitably.

Recent syntheses advance the discussion from attraction toward sustainability. Campos Quezada and Castillo Ortiz (2024) map sustainable gastronomy-tourism scholarship across destination management, culinary heritage, sociocultural dynamics, and environmental governance. Fernández and Irimia-Diéguez (2025) identify the links between food tourism and local economies while noting empirical gaps concerning local effects. Orea-Giner et al. (2026) demonstrate that food events must be assessed through community participation and social sustainability, not solely visitor-facing performance. These studies suggest that place promotion is best viewed as one activity within a broader, locally embedded development system.

Role theory and the distinction between expectation and performance

Role theory holds that institutional positions carry expectations concerning appropriate behavior, but actual performance is shaped by norms, organizational resources, interdependence, and potential role conflict (Biddle, 1986). In local government, an agency may be expected simultaneously to regulate, convene, support enterprises, preserve heritage, and represent the city. These expectations can compete: rapid festival-

led promotion may receive resources more readily than slower interventions in food safety, heritage documentation, or business development. Analytical attention should therefore move from nominal responsibilities toward observable activities and the institutional conditions governing their execution.

The four governmental functions reported in the Padang study—planner, facilitator, promoter, and coordinator—are treated here as empirical role categories. They are not presented as the four canonical constructs of Biddle's theory. Instead, role theory helps explain why official expectations, enacted tasks, and stakeholder evaluations may diverge. This distinction prevents circular reasoning: merely labeling an office a facilitator does not demonstrate that culinary enterprises have gained sustained capabilities.

Collaborative governance, network power, and institutional conversion

Collaborative governance provides a second lens. Ansell and Gash (2008) describe how starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and collaborative processes shape cross-sector governance. Emerson et al. (2012) conceptualize collaborative dynamics in terms of principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. Applied to culinary development, these dimensions imply that a Pentahelix or Hexahelix forum should be assessed by decision rules, participation quality, resource contributions, implementation responsibilities, and accountability. The number of stakeholder categories is an inadequate proxy for the quality of collaboration.

Dredge (2006) further shows why tourism networks require attention to the relationship between influential policy actors and the broader community. Highly visible partners may facilitate innovation while smaller food producers, women-led enterprises, peripheral neighborhoods, or

custodians of intangible heritage remain weakly represented. This issue is especially salient when a city seeks international recognition: external-facing branding can be institutionally easier than inclusive local coordination. The analytical concern is not whether collaboration exists rhetorically, but whether it converts into shared implementation capacity.

Building on these theories, this paper advances an institutional-conversion framework. The initial stage is strategic recognition of gastronomy as a development priority; the second is interorganizational coordination; the third is conversion into enterprise, heritage, and place-based capabilities; and the fourth is public-value monitoring, feedback, and adaptation. This is a conceptual interpretation of the reported case, not a statistically tested process model. Its advantage is to make visible the institutional space between promotional commitments and assessable outcomes.

METHODS

Research design and unit of analysis

The research used a descriptive qualitative approach focused on the Padang City Tourism Office and culinary-tourism settings in Padang between November 2025 and May 2026. The unit of analysis is the local government's enacted institutional role within the city's gastronomy-development agenda. A single-case design is appropriate for exploring how institutional mandates, program practices, and stakeholder relationships intersect in a specific setting; however, it does not by itself establish generalizable causal estimates or demonstrate program impact.

Participants, evidence, and analytical boundaries

Purposive selection covered eight interviewees across seven professional categories: the head of the Tourism Office, the agency secretary, two division heads, one section head, one staff member, and

two culinary micro- or small-enterprise actors. This composition foregrounds institutional implementation while providing a limited counterpoint from small

enterprises. It does not claim representativeness of the city’s much larger culinary economy.

Table 1. Composition of the qualitative informant sample

Informant role	Persons
Head of Tourism Office	1
Secretary of Tourism Office	1
Division heads	2
Section head	1
Creative-economy staff	1
Culinary enterprise actors	2
TOTAL	8

Data collection combined in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentary review. Analysis was organized around an interactive process of data reduction, thematic display, and conclusion verification, with source and technique triangulation reported as a credibility strategy. The available account provides consolidated thematic findings rather than a publicly auditable transcript archive; consequently, this article does not present unverifiable verbatim quotations, respondent-level frequency counts, or claims of intercoder reliability and saturation. The distinction between descriptive evidence and theoretical interpretation is maintained throughout the findings and discussion.

Documentary update and analysis

To enhance policy currency without contaminating the fieldwork record, separately identified public materials from 2025–2026 are used as contextual documentary evidence. Documents released after May 2026 are considered only when interpreting subsequent institutional developments. The analytic process links reported activities to the four role categories, identifies the five reported constraints, and evaluates plausible governance mechanisms using role theory and collaborative-governance scholarship. Credibility rests on transparent

differentiation among source-reported findings, external documentary corroboration, and authorial interpretation; no claim of independent primary-data verification is made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning: creating strategic direction without equating plans with implementation

The qualitative findings identify planning as the first prominent role of the Tourism Office. The reported trajectory combines a shift in creative-economy orientation toward gastronomy, preparation of a multi-year roadmap, attention to the UCCN application dossier, and efforts to develop thematic culinary spaces. Planning here is not merely the production of a policy document; it is the creation of a shared frame connecting food heritage, enterprise development, spatial investment, and destination identity. The empirical record nevertheless provides considerably stronger evidence of agenda-setting and proposal preparation than of completed implementation or independently measured results.

The timing of the roadmap is material. The policy account describes a Gastronomy Roadmap for 2026–2030, but the supporting university announcement is dated June 2026, after the stated end of fieldwork. This later confirmation indicates

continuing interorganizational planning and can strengthen the account as documentary context (Universitas Negeri Padang, 2026). It cannot retroactively be treated as an observation made during a May 2026 interview. In analytical terms, the key unresolved question is whether the roadmap will acquire defined budgets, implementation owners, milestones, and publicly reviewable indicators.

Facilitation: developing culinary enterprise capabilities

The second role concerns practical assistance for local culinary businesses. The fieldwork account reports support for business legality, halal certification, hygiene and sanitation, packaging innovation, digital promotion, and entrepreneurship training. It also cites the Rumah Rendang initiative at Lubuk Buaya as an educational and product-development space illustrating how a well-known dish can be presented through multiple locally adapted preparations. These initiatives indicate a policy orientation toward entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer, rather than a narrow marketing role.

At the same time, the fieldwork identifies uneven human-resource and financial capacity among small operators. The presence of training opportunities should not be conflated with measured improvements in compliance, sales, product quality, or household welfare. An institutional capability perspective asks whether enterprises can use the assistance, whether the least-connected businesses are reached, and whether follow-up support exists after a workshop. The proposed distinction is between service delivery as an administrative output and sustained enterprise capability as a development outcome.

Promotion: amplifying recognition while safeguarding cultural meaning

The Tourism Office's third role is promotional. The case findings identify

Taste of Padang Experience / Road to Gastronomy City activities, city branding, and digital media as instruments for circulating Padang's culinary identity. It also describes the 356th-anniversary celebration context, which corresponds to 2025; subsequently publicized Taste of Padang programming for 2026 should be understood as a later event cycle rather than the same observation. Festivals and promotional events can increase visibility, but they carry the risk that gastronomic complexity will be reduced to a small set of marketable dishes.

A wider interpretive framework distinguishes exposure from cultural engagement. Digital reach and event attendance may be useful outputs, yet they say little about the visibility of smaller producers, fair remuneration, representation of diverse culinary traditions, or links with local supply chains. In light of Orea-Giner et al. (2026), festival-led promotion should be evaluated for community participation and social sustainability as well as destination awareness. The original material does not provide attendance or economic-impact data sufficient to judge these effects.

Coordination: establishing a collaborative architecture

The fourth role is coordination across government, universities, businesses, culinary communities, and media. The findings report a task-force arrangement and Pentahelix/Hexahelix cooperation as part of the city's institutional response. University involvement in roadmap preparation was publicly reported in June 2026 (Universitas Negeri Padang, 2026), while later municipal documentation portrays national application preparation as a multi-actor process (Padang City Government, 2026b). This supports the assessment that the agenda extends beyond one municipal agency, without proving that all participants exercise equal

influence or that coordination has yet produced integrated outcomes.

For collaborative governance, the decisive questions are whether stakeholders jointly formulate priorities, share resources, agree on responsibilities, mediate tensions, and review results. The underlying manuscript does not document meeting minutes, decision rights, cross-organizational budgets, or systematic stakeholder perceptions sufficient to establish the depth of deliberation. Coordination can therefore be described as a visible institutional effort, while the quality of collaboration remains an empirical question for future investigation.

Five implementation constraints and their institutional significance

First, the transition from performing arts toward gastronomy creates an institutional adaptation challenge. Policies, staff expertise, budget categories, and performance indicators developed for one creative subsector may not readily serve another. Second, the reported low level of

gastronomy literacy among some residents, visitors, and businesses suggests a mismatch between heritage-centered destination narratives and transactional understandings of food. These constraints imply that the city cannot rely on top-down branding alone.

Third, uneven skills and capital among culinary micro- and small enterprises complicate consistent quality, hygiene, service, and digital adoption. Fourth, incomplete documentation of culinary practices and enterprises outside high-visibility corridors risks concentrating recognition and investment spatially. Fifth, competition among businesses selling similar products without differentiation or heritage narratives may undermine the capacity to capture value from local distinctiveness. These five issues emerge in the study’s descriptive findings; the interpretation that they function together as institutional-conversion bottlenecks is developed in the present analysis.

Table 2. Role-to-capability interpretation of the reported case

Governmental role	Evidence and unresolved test
Planner	Reported roadmap and dossier work; test for funded milestones and assigned owners.
Facilitator	Reported legality, hygiene, halal, packaging and digital support; test for sustained MSME uptake.
Promoter	Reported events and online promotion; test for inclusive reach, cultural integrity and local benefit.
Coordinator	Reported intersectoral forums; test for shared decisions, action tracking and accountability.

Taken together, the findings suggest that program visibility may advance faster than implementation depth. Padang possesses highly recognizable culinary assets and an increasingly organized city-level ambition, but the available qualitative evidence does not establish that its governance instruments have yet overcome capacity gaps or uneven participation. This is an observation about the limits of the available record rather than a negative evaluation of every program.

DISCUSSION
Theoretical contribution: institutional conversion rather than nominal role performance

The study contributes to public-administration research by distinguishing formal governmental role performance from the institutional conversion of roles into public capabilities. Biddle’s (1986) framework clarifies why role expectations can exceed enacted performance when

resources and interorganizational responsibilities are dispersed. The Padang case illustrates a recognizable pattern: a city can exhibit planning, promotion, facilitation, and coordination simultaneously while remaining constrained by unresolved implementation requirements. The contribution is not the discovery of these four role labels but their positioning within a sequential—and potentially interrupted—governance process.

This perspective complements, rather than duplicates, the collaborative-governance argument. Ansell and Gash (2008) and Emerson et al. (2012) explain why inclusive institutional design and collective capacity matter. The proposed conversion mechanism specifies what collaboration must achieve in a gastronomy-city context: strategic commitments must become service capabilities for culinary producers; heritage knowledge must be translated into accessible experiences without losing custodianship; and monitoring must determine whether place-branding outputs generate public value. The relationship is conceptual and should be subjected to subsequent longitudinal testing.

Rijal et al. (2026) offer relevant Indonesian evidence that collaborative governance and local livelihood resources are associated with urban gastronomic tourism sustainability in Makassar. The Padang case differs in analytic emphasis: it examines the administrative architecture of a city still pursuing international recognition, rather than testing a structural model of tourism performance. Read together, the studies suggest that cultural reputation and livelihood capital cannot substitute for governance arrangements that bridge the city-wide agenda and the capacities of dispersed small enterprises. Such comparison is theoretically informative, but differences in

samples and methods prevent direct effect-size comparisons.

The paradox of recognition and inclusive development

International network ambitions can create a useful focal point for coordinated action, but they also generate incentives to favor legible, short-term achievements: events, visual branding, documentation, and central-city rehabilitation. The risk is not that these outputs are unimportant, but that they become substitutes for slower institutional work on training, inclusive representation, fair procurement, archival documentation, and access to financing. The UCCN mission itself emphasizes inclusion and sustainable urban planning (UNESCO, 2026), suggesting that nomination readiness should be evaluated as a development capacity rather than an endpoint.

Padang's Old Town and the Batang Arau corridor are identified as possible anchors for multicultural culinary tourism. Heritage-sensitive regeneration could connect Minangkabau, Chinese, Malay, Nias, and Indian food histories in a distinctive urban narrative. Yet such projects may privilege established commercial locations unless they are linked to city-wide culinary mapping, neighborhood participation, and transparent vendor selection. This concern is consistent with network analysis demonstrating that active tourism stakeholders may not reflect the interests of the larger local community (Dredge, 2006).

Policy architecture and measurable priorities

A practical governance response should operate at three connected levels. At the strategic level, the municipality should designate a cross-agency steering arrangement with published milestones, budgets, and rules for stakeholder selection. At the delivery level, the Tourism Office and partners should build

repeatable assistance pathways covering enterprise formalization, hygiene, halal processes where applicable, product development, digital competence, and culturally informed interpretation. At the community level, neighborhood-based documentation and participation mechanisms should widen access beyond flagship districts. This architecture translates the nominal four roles into explicit implementation responsibilities.

Measurement should likewise proceed from activities to outcomes. Counting festivals, training sessions, or

social-media posts is necessary but inadequate. A balanced dashboard could include the share of supported enterprises completing follow-up assistance, geographic distribution of beneficiaries, documented heritage practices with community consent, local sourcing partnerships, participant satisfaction, repeat visitor engagement, and publicly disclosed progress against roadmap commitments. Baseline estimates are not established in the qualitative dataset; indicators below are proposed for future implementation, not reported results.

Table 3. Proposed indicators for the gastronomy-city governance agenda

Governance dimension	Proposed indicator / verification
Inclusion	Share of beneficiary MSMEs from non-core neighborhoods; published sampling frame.
Capability	Proportion completing follow-up hygiene, legality or digital support; administrative records.
Heritage	Community-validated inventory entries and consent procedures; heritage register.
Collaboration	Joint decisions with named owners and tracked deadlines; meeting/action logs.
Public value	Local supplier engagement and resident feedback; independent periodic evaluation.

A further requirement concerns credible causal evaluation. If the municipality seeks to show that gastronomy policy improves livelihoods, it should collect pre-intervention baselines, specify outcomes and comparison strategies, and track enterprises over time. The qualitative evidence provides descriptive insight into perceived constraints and reported agency actions, but cannot establish that these actions caused higher income, improved employment, stronger identity, or UNESCO recognition. OECD (2026) similarly emphasizes balanced social, environmental, and economic tourism governance, reinforcing the need for outcome-oriented evidence.

Methodological limitations and research agenda

The study is subject to four substantive limitations. First, it is a single-city case with eight participants and a heavy emphasis on municipal institutional perspectives; two culinary entrepreneurs cannot represent Padang’s wider enterprise population. Second, the presented thematic account does not include a full transcript-level audit trail, limiting external assessment of theme formation and negative cases. Third, later official announcements corroborate institutional developments but are promotional or administrative documents, not independent impact evaluations. Fourth, the cross-sectional descriptive record cannot test the sequence or causal direction proposed in the institutional-conversion framework.

Future work should extend the evidence base through interviews with

informal food producers, women-led businesses, heritage custodians, suppliers, residents, and visitors; systematic review of budgets and implementation logs; and multi-year tracking of enterprise outcomes and spatial access. A comparative design involving cities with different stages of UCCN participation could distinguish pre-recognition mobilization from post-recognition governance. Process tracing could investigate whether interorganizational decisions are followed by funded actions and measurable community benefits, while mixed-method surveys could examine the distribution of opportunities across enterprise types and neighborhoods.

CONCLUSION

Padang's movement toward a gastronomy-city identity is best understood as a transition in local governance, not simply a culinary marketing campaign. The source qualitative case identifies four governmental roles—planning, facilitation, promotion, and coordination—and five persistent constraints involving institutional adaptation, public understanding, enterprise capabilities, spatial coverage, and competitive differentiation. These findings demonstrate the variety of municipal activity while also revealing why the presence of programs and partnerships cannot, on its own, establish sustainable destination outcomes.

By integrating role theory with collaborative-governance perspectives, this article proposes an institutional-conversion framework that connects strategic recognition, collaborative action, enterprise and heritage capability, and public-value monitoring. The framework directs attention to operational questions: who participates, which capabilities improve, whether resources reach peripheral communities, and how progress is measured. It positions the 2027

UNESCO ambition as an ongoing policy objective and treats post-fieldwork developments as contextual evidence rather than retrospective interview results. Stronger conclusions about impact will require verified primary data, longitudinal indicators, and broader stakeholder inclusion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The municipality should give the 2026–2030 gastronomy roadmap a clearly specified implementation matrix, including responsible agencies, budget pathways, a calendar of milestones, and periodic public reporting. Enterprise assistance should be offered as a staged capability-development pathway rather than isolated training events. The proposed Old Town culinary hub should be linked to neighborhood-level heritage mapping, transparent access criteria, and local procurement opportunities. Cross-sector forums should publish the decisions, responsibilities, and follow-up actions necessary to distinguish collaborative governance from symbolic participation. Finally, an independent monitoring arrangement should assess cultural, social, economic, and environmental outcomes before policy success is attributed to international recognition.

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