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Sectoral Ego Versus Collaboration: Comparing The Regulatory and Institutional Foundations of Digital Transformation In Balikpapan City and Samarinda City

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the foundational readiness for digital government transformation by comparing the regulatory and institutional capacities of two major cities in East Kalimantan, Indonesia: Kota Balikpapan and Kota Samarinda. Using a qualitative comparative case study, data were gathered from in-depth document analysis, surveys of eight local government officials, and semi-structured interviews with eight key informants from the Communication and Information Offices. The findings reveal a stark divergence in institutional execution despite similar regulatory frameworks. Kota Balikpapan's strong technical regulations are hindered by pervasive sectoral ego (reported by all respondents), creating implementation friction. In contrast, Kota Samarinda exhibits a collaborative institutional culture with no inter-agency resistance, driven by its integrative "Smart City Plus" vision and a centralized service platform. The study concludes that mature digital government depends less on regulatory completeness and more on deliberate governance engineering, intentional design of collaborative structures, leadership as integrators, and trust-based operational cultures. This research contributes by asserting that in decentralized contexts, the sociopolitical dynamics of local bureaucracy are the ultimate determinants of success, outweighing technology alone.

Keywords: *Digital Government Transformation[1], Regulatory Readiness[2], Collaborative Governance[3], Local Bureaucracy[4], Smart City[5].*

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation in governance is not merely a technological phenomenon, but a paradigmatic revolution that touches the core of the relationship between the state and its citizens (Janowski, 2015; Mergel et al., 2019). In Indonesia, this transformative wave has gained momentum following the issuance

of Presidential Regulation Number 95 of 2018 on Electronic-Based Government Systems (SPBE) and Presidential Regulation Number 39 of 2019 on One Data Indonesia. These two national policies serve as the primary compass directing all regional governments to transform, no longer as an option, but as a necessity of the times (Akbar et al., 2022; Setyawan et al., 2025). However, amidst the euphoria of building digital platforms and public service applications, a fundamental question arises: how prepared are our regulatory and institutional foundations to support such grand digital ambitions?

The experience of various countries, as illustrated in the literature, shows that the success of digital government transformation heavily relies on the maturity of two non-technical pillars: regulation and institutions (Luna-Reyes & Gil-Garcia, J. R., 2014). Regulation acts as the "rule of the game," providing legal certainty, technical standards, and data protection. Meanwhile, institutions are the engines of implementation, determining how effectively these regulations are brought to life in daily bureaucratic practices (Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022). Without these foundations, massive technological investments risk culminating in a "digital Babel tower": many systems are built but cannot "speak" to one another, a problem known as interoperability (Akbar et al., 2022; Quek et al., 2023).

This challenge becomes even more complex in the context of Indonesia's decentralized system. Each region possesses unique characteristics, capacities, and local political dynamics, making a "one-size-fits-all" approach from the central government often inadequate (Prakoso, 2022; Senshaw & Twinomurinzi, 2020). Previous studies, such as a bibliometric analysis by Malik et al. (2023), have underscored that the success of policy digitalization depends heavily on effective interaction and coordination across various levels of government (multi-level governance). This confirms that digital transformation is essentially a complex governance project (Redha et al., 2025). This is where a comparative study between two cities with different characteristics, yet both serving as regional development locomotives, becomes crucial. Balikpapan City and Samarinda City in East Kalimantan Province present two interesting cases. Both are major cities, share the same national regulatory mandate, and have the vision of becoming smart cities

(Akbar et al., 2024). However, they have grown from distinct historical, economic, and socio-political roots, which have subsequently influenced how they build their digital foundations.

Balikpapan City, known as an energy-industrial city and the gateway to the new capital city (IKN), has adopted a systematic, gradual digital transformation approach. The vision of "An Innovative Technology-Based Smart City" is realized through six Smart City pillars, with a strong emphasis on Smart Economy (Smartcity.Kota Balikpapan.go.id, 2025). Its regulations are structured in tiers, starting with data governance and SPBE and ending with cybersecurity. Meanwhile, Samarinda City, as the provincial capital with a linear settlement character along the Mahakam River, opts for a more visionary and integrative approach. Through its "Smart City Plus" concept, the city not only pursues technological sophistication but also incorporates values of humaneness, participation, and ecological sustainability into every digital policy (sakti.Kota Samarindakota.go.id, 2025). The "Samagov" super-app serves as a symbol of this centralized and service-oriented approach (Christover et al., 2023; samagov.id, 2025).

This difference in approach raises a significant question. Is Balikpapan's comprehensive and sequential regulatory approach more effective in creating a solid foundation? Or is Samarinda's visionary and participatory approach better equipped to create a living, collaborative digital ecosystem? This question is not only relevant to these two cities but also to hundreds of other regional governments in Indonesia, struggling to find the most suitable digital transformation model for their respective contexts.

Based on the above intellectual concern, this article aims to critically dissect the regulatory and institutional readiness of both cities on their journey towards digital government. Specifically, this article aims to: (1) Analyze and compare the strengths and weaknesses of the digital regulatory frameworks in Balikpapan City and Samarinda City, not only in terms of technical completeness but also their ability to be implemented within unique bureaucratic cultures; (2) Evaluate the effectiveness of institutional structures, culture, and governance (including

unraveling the root problems of sectoral ego and collaborative practices) in driving or, conversely, hindering transformation (Zhang et al., 2025); (3) Identify key contextual factors (such as leadership, budget allocation patterns, socio-graphic characteristics, and daily communication and coordination dynamics) that become the main differentiators in the performance and transformation trajectories of the two cities.

By answering these questions, this article contributes in two ways. In practice, the findings from this comparative study can serve as a mirror and a navigation map for regional policymakers, particularly in designing targeted interventions to overcome institutional fragmentation and build a collaborative digital ecosystem. Theoretically, this article contributes to enriching the discourse on digital government in Indonesia by providing empirical evidence that, in a decentralized developing country context, the success of digital transformation is heavily determined by the capacity for "governance engineering", the deliberate effort to redesign institutional relationships, incentives, and collaboration patterns to align technological progress with the unique maturity of local governance (Mergel et al., 2019; Picazo-Vela et al., 2018).

RESEARCH METHOD

To understand the foundational readiness for digital transformation, this research is designed as a qualitative comparative case study focusing on Balikpapan City and Samarinda City. These two cities were deliberately selected for their similar contexts: both are major cities in East Kalimantan with identical national regulatory mandates and an established political commitment to innovative urban development, yet they show initial differences in approach and socio-economic characteristics. This comparison allows us to isolate factors that truly differentiate the digital transformation trajectories beyond mere regulatory compliance (De Blasio & Selva, 2019). A qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to capture the nuances and complexity of institutional dynamics that cannot be reduced to mere numbers (Creswell, 2014).

This research collected data through three complementary methods to obtain a comprehensive and valid picture (Basiroen et al., 2025). The first stage was an in-

depth analysis of regulatory and planning documents from both cities, such as the Mayor's Regulations on SPBE, Smart City Master Plans, and RPJMD, to map the formal framework. Subsequently, to capture the perceptions and experiences of direct actors, we distributed closed questionnaires to eight technical officials, with four from each city, who handle digital transformation programs daily. To complement this, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight key informants from the Communication and Information Offices (Diskominfo) of both cities. The selection of informants from Diskominfo is strategic, as this agency is the lead sector and has the most comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of coordination, implementation challenges, and inter-organizational relations (Hernandez et al., 2022).

All qualitative data collected were then analyzed thematically. Using NVivo software, interview data and document notes were coded to identify emerging patterns and main themes (Woolf & Silver, 2018). This process did not stop at describing each case but continued with rigorous comparative analysis. We systematically contrasted and integrated findings from Balikpapan City and Samarinda City to identify similarities, differences, and causal relationships that could explain why foundations that appear similar on paper give rise to such different practices and outcomes in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings reveal an interesting dialectic between formal uniformity and practical diversity in local government digital transformation. This section presents an in-depth comparative analysis of the two faces of implementation from the same national mandate, while simultaneously answering the three research questions posed.

Regulation: Two Faces of Implementation from One National Mandate

Formally, the regulatory landscape in Balikpapan City and Samarinda City is highly similar. Both have equipped themselves with derivative legal instruments from the Presidential Regulations on SPBE and One Data Indonesia, indicating a compliant response to the central mandate (Mutiarin et al., 2023; Setyawan et al., 2025). However, when delving deeper into the philosophy and spirit shaping these

regulations, as well as how they are brought to life in daily practice, the two cities exhibit different characters. This difference confirms previous findings that the success of implementing digital regulations depends heavily on contextualization and the internalization of values within the local bureaucratic culture, not merely on administrative compliance (Janowski, 2015; Luna-Reyes & Gil-Garcia, J. R., 2014).

Table 1. Digital Transformation Regulatory Framework of Balikpapan City and Samarinda City
Source: processed by the author

Regulation	
Balikpapan City	Samarinda City
National Regulation	
• Presidential Regulation 95/2018: Electronic-Based Government System • Presidential Regulation 39/2019: One Data Indonesia	• Presidential Regulation 95/2018: Electronic-Based Government System • Presidential Regulation 39/2019: One Data Indonesia
Local Regulation	
• Local Regulation 6/2021: RPJMD 2021-2026 (Main document for development & digitalization vision-mission) • Mayor's Decree 188.45-390/2021: Smart City Masterplan (Guiding document with roadmap 2021-2026) • Mayor's Regulation 39/2019: Integrated Local One Data (Strengthening data governance & OPD coordination) • Mayor's Regulation 31/2020: Implementation of SPBE (Technical implementation of institution & infrastructure) • Mayor's Regulation 14/2022: Implementation of SPBE (Governance refinement)	• Local Regulation 4/2021: RPJMD 2021-2026 (Political commitment & Smart City framework) • Mayor's Regulation 79/2022: Smart City Plus Masterplan (Vision, strategy, detailed action plan) • Mayor's Regulation 27/2021: Implementation of Local One Data (SDD) (Accurate & exchangeable data) • Mayor's Regulation 10/2022: Implementation of SPBE (SPBE governance supporting Smart City) • Mayor's Regulation 72/2022: Amendment to Mayor's Regulation 10/2022 (Technical refinement of SPBE)

Regulation	
Balikpapan City	Samarinda City
• Mayor's Regulation 03/2023: SPBE Information Security Management (Cybersecurity & data assurance)	• Mayor's Regulation 16/2023: SPBE Information Security Management (Digital service security assurance)

As seen in Table 1, Balikpapan City builds its regulatory framework on a highly structured, technical-sequential approach. Its steps resemble a clear blueprint: starting with Mayor's Regulation 39/2019 to improve data governance as the foundation, followed by Mayor's Regulations 31/2020 and 14/2022 to build the institutional house of SPBE, and ending with Mayor's Regulation 03/2023 as the security for the entire digital structure built. This approach reflects the city's patterned, disciplined, and procedure-oriented bureaucratic culture. It is like an engineer who believes that with a strong foundation and framework, the building will stand firm. However, in practice, this technical regulatory strength faces challenges in interpretation and adoption. An informant from the Diskominfo of Balikpapan City honestly admitted, *"The Mayor's Regulation is already in place, as are the technical guidelines. However, when it comes down to the OPDs, individual interpretations often arise. For example, regarding standardized data formats, even though they are standardized, in operation, they often still use old formats, citing system readiness or habit."* Thus, regulations in Balikpapan City exist as very clear rules on paper, but experience 'friction' in field execution due to variations in capacity and commitment at the OPD level. This phenomenon aligns with studies showing that overly rigid and technical regulations often fail to be fully adopted if not accompanied by adequate mentoring and capacity building at the end-user level (Kupi & McBride, 2021; Senshaw & Twinomurinzi, 2020).

Unlike Balikpapan City, Samarinda City embraces a visionary-integrative approach. Regulations are not viewed merely as a list of technical obligations, but as an instrument to realize a greater city vision, "Smart City Plus." The "Plus" concept in Mayor's Regulation 79/2022 becomes an essential differentiator; it adds layers of humanistic values, participation, and sustainability into the city's digital policy DNA. Regulations such as Local One Data (Mayor's Regulation 27/2021)

and SPBE (Mayor's Regulation 10/2022) are not standalone but understood as inseparable parts of the effort to create a more humane and participatory city (Hardi et al., 2025). Consequently, implementing regulations in Samarinda City is not merely about fulfilling an administrative checklist. It is imbued with a collective spirit to achieve a larger common goal. *A source described, "Here, the Smart City Plus Masterplan is like a shared guide. We do not just socialize it; we involve every OPD in discussions about their role in realizing this vision. So, for example, the Mayor's Regulation on One Data is not understood as an additional burden, but as a tool so that we can interconnect and provide better services to the community."* Regulations in Samarinda City have successfully transformed from legal texts into a shared narrative that guides action. This approach supports the argument that the success of digital governance is highly influenced by the ability to create shared meaning and to link regulations to a vision that mobilizes collaboration (Mergel et al., 2019; Picazo-Vela et al., 2018).

This comparison teaches an important lesson. Regulatory completeness is a fundamental prerequisite, but it is not a guarantee of success (Layne & Lee, 2001). The effectiveness of regulations is determined mainly by their ability to migrate from the abstract world of articles into the organization's practical logic and work culture. Balikpapan City shows that even a superior technical approach can falter if not accompanied by serious efforts to align perceptions and build shared ownership at the implementer level. Samarinda City, on the other hand, demonstrates that when regulations are tied to a meaningful collective vision and involve participation in their interpretation, they can become a unifying and more powerful driving force for transformation (De Blasio & Selva, 2019). In other words, the "spirit" of a regulation turns out to be more determinant of its impact than the "body" of its articles.

Institutions: Sectoral Ego versus Collaboration in Digital Transformation

If regulation is the written roadmap, then institutions are the engine that drives the journey. This is where digital transformation undergoes its real test, beginning with a question: are the organizational structures, culture, and dynamics

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capable of driving or, conversely, hindering change? The findings of this research reveal an almost bipolar contrast between Balikpapan City and Samarinda City in this regard, as captured in respondent-perception data and in-depth narratives from implementers. This reinforces the literature asserting that technological transformation is ultimately a project of institutional and social change, in which human and political factors are often the primary determinants (Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022; Mergel et al., 2019).

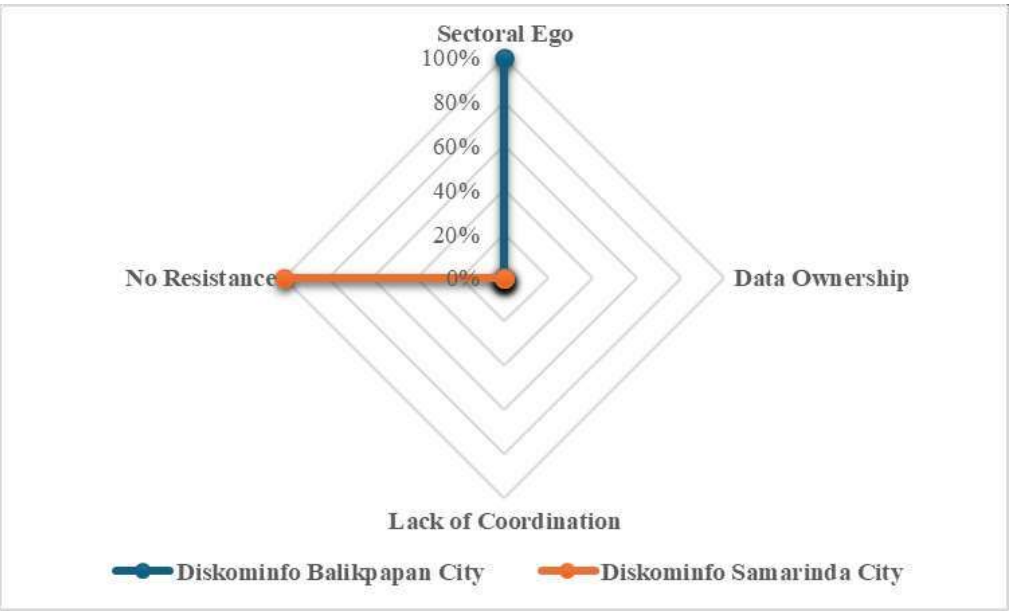

Figure 1. Analysis of OPD Resistance Variables in Balikpapan City and Samarinda City
Source: processed by the author

In Balikpapan City, the institutional narrative is dominated by the struggle against deeply rooted "sectoral ego" (see Figure 1 above). Although supporting institutional structures such as the Smart City Implementation Team and Local One Data Forum have been established, these structures often function more as administrative coordination forums rather than as collaboration engines capable of breaking down interest barriers. An informant bluntly described the root of the problem: *"Here, each OPD feels it has its own 'kingdom.' Data is seen as an asset of power. If there is an integration project, the first question asked is not 'how do we do it?' but 'who will be in control later?' or 'where will the budget be allocated?'."* This perception is reinforced by questionnaire data showing that

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100% of respondents in Balikpapan City (4 out of 4 people) placed sectoral ego as the main obstacle. Even reasonable regulations become blunt tools in such an ecosystem, as no one feels most responsible for driving cross-boundary implementation. The perceived strong leadership (75% of respondents rated it "Very High") has not been fully able to break through this bureaucratic wall (see Figure 2). This support has been manifested more through macro policies and general budget allocation, but less through direct interventions that force integration and break coordination deadlocks at the technical level. This situation confirms previous research that sectoral ego and institutional fragmentation are classic challenges in cross-sectoral policy implementation, especially in bureaucracies oriented towards hierarchy and resource control (Kuwawenaruwa et al., 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2024).

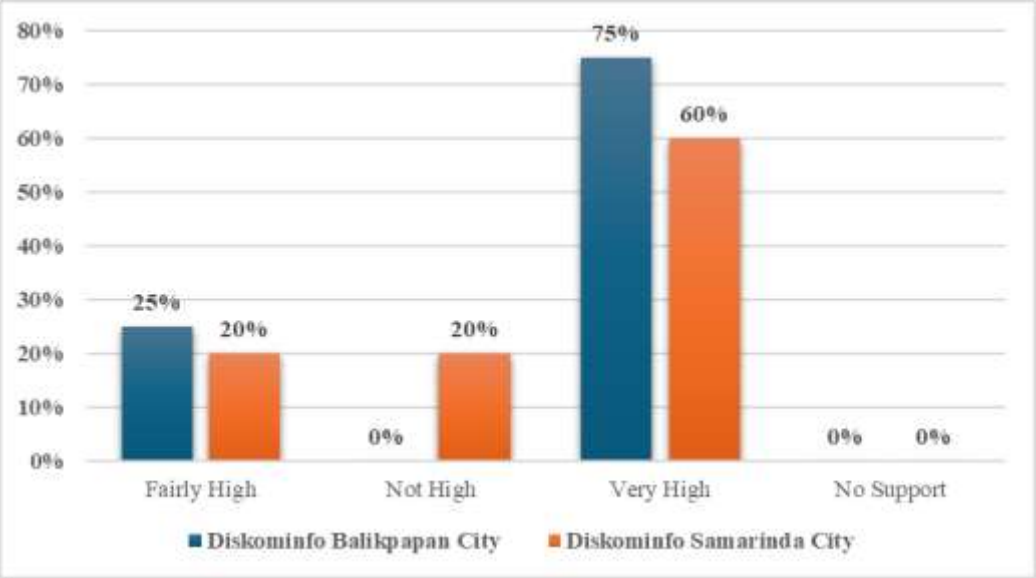

Figure 2. Analysis of OPD Resistance Variables in Balikpapan City and Samarinda City
Source: processed by the author

Conversely, in Samarinda City, the institutional landscape is painted with colors of collaboration and synergy. What stands out is the absence of OPD resistance in the perception of all respondents,0% or 0 out of 4 people (see Figure 1 above). This does not mean there are no differences of opinion or interests, but such conflicts are successfully managed within the framework of a larger common

goal. The key to success lies in two things. First, leadership that not only supports but also enforces collaboration. The Mayor consistently prioritizes service integration and uses his authority to resolve inter-OPD deadlocks. Second, a strategic platform-centric approach. By establishing the Samagov super-app as the city's single digital service face, Samarinda City creates a focal point that forces all OPDs to align their systems and data. As revealed by an informant, *"With Samagov as the ultimate goal, OPDs have no other choice. They must adapt. If not, their service will not appear on the city's main platform. It is like we are building one large terminal; all transportation must enter that terminal."* This approach transforms coordination from merely being meetings into an operational necessity. This pattern aligns with the concept of "platform governance," where a centralized digital platform functions as infrastructure that forces standardization and integration while reducing room for independent and fragmented operation (Guo et al., 2024; Quek et al., 2023).

From this sharp comparison, the emerging lesson is that in digital transformation, formal organizational structures are merely empty frameworks. What fills them with life are the organizational culture, leadership that persistently engages, and precise incentive/disincentive mechanisms. Balikpapan City teaches that without systematic efforts to change the mindset from "sectoral ownership" to "collective city ownership," any number of coordination structures will stall. Samarinda City shows that such a mindset change can be accelerated by creating conditions that leave no room for sectoral ego to grow, either through top-down pressure or by creating practical needs for integration (operational necessity). Thus, building institutions ready for digital government is essentially about social engineering within the bureaucracy, which is far more complex than merely engineering information technology systems. This finding supports the view that successful digital collaboration requires not only "collaborative capability" but also deliberately designed "incentive architecture" to overcome opportunistic behavior and build trust (Picazo-Vela et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2025).

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Achievements and Challenges: Reflections from the SPBE Index and Field Narratives

To measure how far these regulatory and institutional foundations contribute to measurable progress, we can observe the fluctuations in the SPBE Index as a national barometer. The achievements of the two cities, as visualized in Figure 3 below, tell a story of resilience, momentum, and different strategies in facing transformation challenges. The SPBE Index as a measurement tool provides an aggregate picture, but behind these numbers lies a more complex narrative of learning, adaptation, and strategic priorities (Luna et al., 2014; Prakoso, 2022).

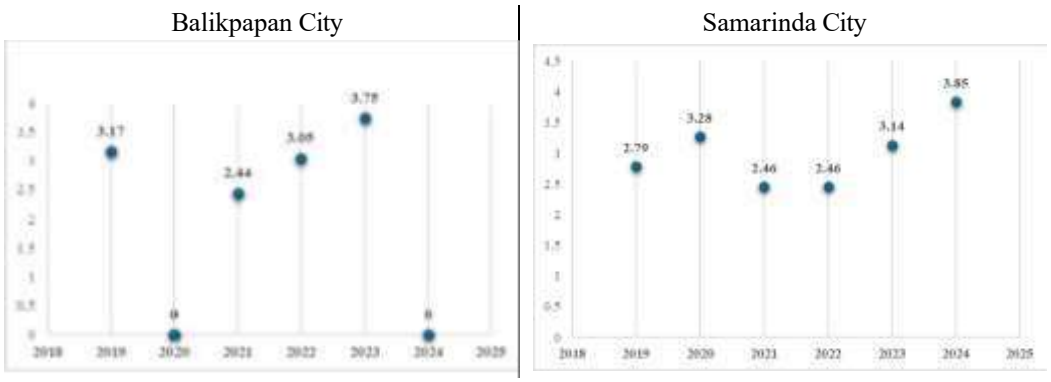

Figure 3. Fluctuations in SPBE Index Scores of Balikpapan City and Samarinda City
Source: processed by the author

Balikpapan City started in 2019 with a "Good" category (3.17) but declined to "Fair" (2.44) in 2021. Based on interviews, this period was one of heavy internal adaptation and restructuring, in which efforts to build data-based systems and SPBE had to confront the reality of sectoral ego and budget limitations. However, the city showed resilience and consistency, rising back to the "Good" category (3.05) in 2022 and reaching a peak of "Very Good" (3.75) in 2023. This surge reflects the fruit of systematic regulatory arrangements and ongoing efforts in human resource capacity building, although coordination challenges remain. Field narratives describe this as a journey of "one step forward, half a step back, then two steps forward again", like a struggling yet consistent transformation. This pattern indicates an evolutionary-consolidative approach, in which the city gradually lays

foundations and absorbs shocks of internal adjustment to achieve stable progress (Janowski, 2015).

On the other hand, Samarinda City shows a more fluctuating pattern. After achieving "Good" (3.28) in 2020, its index dropped and remained in the "Medium" category (2.46) during 2021-2022. According to informants, this was a critical period where the Smart City Plus Masterplan was formulated and various old systems were evaluated to align with the new integrative vision. This "house-cleaning" and system migration process indeed caused turbulence and temporary adjustments that impacted the scores. However, the momentum for change finally paid off with a spectacular leap to a score of 3.85 ("Very Good") in 2024. This surge is inseparable from the operational launch of the centralized Samagov platform and the strengthening of a collaborative culture that became the operational foundation of the Smart City Plus vision. Samarinda City's pattern reflects a transformational-accelerative approach, swallowing the bitter pill of deep restructuring midway to create a performance leap in the next stage, a strategy requiring brave leadership and a clear vision (Li et al., 2022; Parcell & Holden, 2013).

Year	Balikpapan City		Samarinda City	
	Score	Category	Score	Category
2019	3.17	Good	2.79	Medium
2020	-	Not Available	3.28	Good
2021	2.44	Medium	2.46	Medium
2022	3.05	Good	2.46	Medium
2023	3.75	Very Good	3.14	Good
2024	-	Not Available	3.85	Very Good

Table 2. SPBE Index Categories of Balikpapan City & Samarinda City
Source: processed by the author

This difference in achievement patterns speaks to strategy and timing. Balikpapan City seems to adopt a more cautious strategy, building foundations gradually and accepting a temporary decline in performance during internal adjustments. Samarinda City more reflects a leapfrog strategy, incurring higher

transformation costs in the mid-period, to accelerate then. Both patterns are valid and reflect the respective cities' capacity contexts and political choices. What is important to note is that progress towards mature digital government is not a straight line. It is a trajectory influenced by strategic decisions, institutional resilience, and most crucially, the ability to learn from temporary setbacks (Mergel et al., 2019). Fluctuations in the index are not a sign of failure but a natural part of the complex change process in bureaucratic systems.

Coordination and Communication Dynamics: Between Formalization and Informality

The digital transformation landscape is not only shaped by written policies and organizational structures but also by the patterns of interaction living among its actors. Behind the tables of Smart City Team meetings and official documents, there are flows of communication and coordination that determine how quickly ideas turn into action. This research finds significant differences in coordination dynamics between Balikpapan City and Samarinda City, which are determinants of the speed and agility of the bureaucratic response to transformation needs. As emphasized in studies on digital collaboration, coordination effectiveness often depends more on the quality of informal interaction and trust among actors than on formal protocols alone (Picazo-Vela et al., 2018).

In Balikpapan City, coordination tends to follow formal-hierarchical paths. Inter-OPD interactions, especially on digital issues, often must go through official channels such as correspondence, coordination meetings scheduled far in advance, and discussions that sometimes get stuck in procedures. An informant described, *"If we want to discuss data integration with another OPD, we usually have to write a letter first, ask for permission from their leadership, and wait for a meeting schedule. Sometimes the momentum has passed. Alternatively, during meetings, decisions cannot be made immediately because they have to be reconfirmed with each leader."* This pattern creates high communication friction. Although coordination forums like the One Data Forum exist, their meetings tend to be scheduled and formal, limiting space for spontaneous discussion and quick

problem-solving. As a result, many digital initiatives move slowly or even stall midway due to convoluted coordination processes. Hernandez, Gil-Garcia, dan Luna-Reyes (2022) Observed that in overly hierarchical environments, the capacity for collective adaptation and innovation is often hampered due to centralized decisions and rigid communication channels.

In contrast, Samarinda City develops a much more fluid and informal coordination ecosystem, while not abandoning its formal framework. Here, in addition to official meetings, intensive communication networks are built at the technical level, such as through online chat groups, direct phone calls, or even impromptu meetings at the city hall. “We have a special WhatsApp group for the Smart City technical team. If there is an integration issue in Samagov, we can tag the relevant person directly in that group. The response is usually fast, because this concerns services that directly impact the community,” said an employee of the Samarinda City Diskominfo. This communication pattern is reinforced by political support that grants technical teams a mandate and trust to make operational decisions without going through long bureaucratic layers every time. For example, the Samarinda City Diskominfo is authorized to resolve technical cross-OPD issues and report the results, not ask for permission for every step. According to Kupi and McBride (2021), an agile approach in digital government requires space for experimentation and rapid problem-solving, often facilitated by informal communication channels and granting autonomy at the technical implementer level. This difference in coordination dynamics has direct implications for organizational agility (Mutiarin et al., 2021). Samarinda City shows that, in the face of rapid changes such as digital transformation, bureaucracy cannot rely solely on rigid formal mechanisms. A strong and trusted informal communication infrastructure is needed, functioning as “oil” to smooth the bureaucratic machinery. This infrastructure enables faster problem identification, solution experimentation, and real-time shared learning. Meanwhile, in Balikpapan City, the bureaucratic machinery still moves with “thicker oil” of procedures and hierarchy, which, although orderly, is less agile in responding to dynamic challenges. Thus, building institutional readiness for digital government is not only about creating the proper

organizational structure but also about designing and maintaining the right culture of communication and coordination. Digital transformation requires space for experimentation, rapid iteration, and learning from failure, things that are difficult to grow in coordination environments that are too rigid and formalistic. The findings from these two cities illustrate that flexibility in interaction often becomes the dividing factor between organizations that merely follow digital trends and those that truly transform.

CONCLUSION

The regional digital transformation journey, as revealed by this comparative study of Balikpapan City and Samarinda City, is essentially a reflection of deeper governance choices. These two cities, with the same national regulatory mandate, have given birth to two digital ecosystems with distinct characters, not because of differences in technology or budget alone, but because of how they organize institutional relations and bring regulations to life as collective practice. Balikpapan City, with its neat technical-procedural approach, actually reveals how strong the walls of sectoral ego can persist even amid infrastructure progress. Meanwhile, Samarinda City, through its integrative "Smart City Plus" vision, demonstrates that collaboration can be engineered into an operational necessity when driven by consistent leadership and a centralized platform that becomes the integration node. These findings lead us to a critical awareness that the most determinative foundation for digital government is non-technical: the governance capacity to build trust, facilitate fluid communication, and design incentives that encourage data sharing as common goods. Comprehensive regulation is only the beginning; its actual value lies in its ability to migrate into a shared work culture. Formal coordination structures are also necessary; yet their power becomes tangible only when filled with living, collaborative dynamics and a clear political mandate to break sectoral deadlocks.

Therefore, the future agenda for regional governments and national policymakers must undergo a fundamental shift. The focus needs to be shifted from merely pursuing technical indicators to deepening the institutional and social

aspects of digital transformation. This means preparing instruments that not only assess technological outputs but also measure and build a climate of collaboration, levels of trust between OPDs, and the maturity of data governance. Regional leadership needs to be positioned as an active integrator role that not only supports but systematically creates conditions that make collaboration the only logical and beneficial path for all parties.

Finally, this study of Balikpapan City and Samarinda City is like opening a window to see other possibilities. The next challenge is to explore how these collaborative governance principles can be adapted to more diverse contexts, including districts/cities with limited resources, and to involve external forces, such as the community and the private sector, in the regional digital ecosystem. What is certain is that building digital government is ultimately about building more open, responsive, and connected governance, an ideal whose achievement heavily depends on our readiness to improve the way we organize and collaborate, long before determining what technological tools we will use.

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