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NARRATIVE OF BATABUAL CROSSROAD INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN BURU DISTRICT: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ILATH VILLAGE COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Road infrastructure development is a government strategy to improve regional connectivity, accelerate economic growth, and reduce development disparities. This study aims to analyze the narrative of the Batabual Cross-Border Road development in Buru Regency from the perspective of the Ilath Village community, Batabual District, by examining how the community interprets the development and its implications for social, economic, cultural, and environmental life. The study uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 15 informants consisting of traditional leaders, community leaders, village officials, fishermen, farmers, youth, women, and the general public, and supported by field observations and documentation studies. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The research findings show that the Batabual Crossroad is interpreted by the community as a symbol of the state's presence, improving accessibility, expanding economic opportunities, and facilitating access to education and health services. However, development also brings about social changes in the form of increased population mobility, changes in social interaction patterns, increased economic competition, and concerns about environmental sustainability and the preservation of local culture. Analysis using the perspectives of Arturo Escobar and Michel Foucault shows that road construction is not only a physical development, but also shapes discourses about modernity, progress, and power relations that are continuously negotiated by the community. This research emphasizes that the success of infrastructure development needs to be measured not only from its physical aspects, but also from its ability to maintain a balance between economic growth, environmental sustainability, and the cultural identity of local communities.

Keywords: development narrative; road infrastructure; local community; Batabual; development anthropology.

Introduction

Infrastructure development has been a top priority for the Indonesian government in recent decades as a strategy to accelerate national economic growth and reduce development disparities between regions. Infrastructure, particularly the road network, is seen as a crucial foundation for strengthening connectivity, streamlining the distribution of goods and services, increasing access to public services, and creating new centers of economic growth. In various national and regional development planning documents, road construction is no longer understood merely as providing transportation, but also as an instrument of social transformation capable of connecting previously isolated regions with centers of economic activity, government, education, and public services.

For an island region like Maluku Province, road infrastructure development is far more strategic than for mainland regions. The geographical characteristics of islands with diverse topography mean that some areas experience limited transportation access. This situation results in high distribution costs for goods, limited community mobility, and slow equitable development. Buru Regency is one of the regencies in Maluku Province facing these challenges. Despite possessing significant natural resource potential in the fisheries, agriculture, plantations, and forestry sectors, various areas within Buru Regency have for years faced infrastructure limitations that impact the quality of life of the community.

One area experiencing this dynamic development is Batabual District, particularly Ilath Village. This village is located on the eastern coast of Buru Regency, which previously relied heavily on sea transportation as the primary means of community mobility. Unpredictable weather conditions, high sea transportation costs, and limited shipping frequency often hamper economic activity and community access to various basic services. In this context, the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road is considered a crucial project, as it is expected to connect Ilath Village with the district capital and other areas on Buru Island.

The construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road is not only seen as a physical development, but also as a representation of the state's presence in ensuring equitable development. Through road construction, the government is building a narrative that regional connectivity will create new economic opportunities, improve public welfare, accelerate public services, and strengthen social integration between regions. This narrative aligns with the modern development paradigm, which positions infrastructure as the primary driver of economic growth and improving the quality of life for the community.

However, various studies in development anthropology show that infrastructure development always produces social consequences that are far more complex than the economic benefits often presented in government planning documents. Infrastructure is not simply a physical object such as a road, bridge, or building, but also a social space that changes the pattern of human relationships with the environment, shifts local economic structures, forms new mobility patterns, and influences the value systems and culture of society. In other words, every physical development always results in social development that brings various forms of change, both intended and unplanned.

This phenomenon is also evident in the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road. Based on field observations, the residents of Ilath Village generally welcomed the road construction, believing it would simplify their daily activities. Travel time to the government center has been shortened, distribution of agricultural and fishery products has become smoother, and access to education and health facilities has improved. The road also opens up opportunities for various new economic activities, such as trade, transportation services, and culinary businesses, increasing the economic value of land around the construction route.

However, the community also highlighted various changes that emerged after the road began operating. Several informants stated that easier access to the village led to an increase in the influx of people from outside the area. This situation has had a positive impact in the form of growing economic activity, but also raised concerns about changing social interaction patterns, increased competition for natural resources, and a shift in the values of togetherness that have long characterized the Ilath Village community. Furthermore, the opening of the road also increases the opportunities for exploitation of forest products and natural resources if not balanced with adequate supervision.

An interview with a community leader in Ilath Village revealed that the road construction has indeed brought significant convenience to the community. According to him, before the road was built, the community had to travel by sea, dependent on weather conditions, often hampering economic activity. Now that the road is in place, garden produce and fish catches can be more easily marketed to Namlea, increasing community incomes. However, he also emphasized that development must be accompanied by policies that protect the interests of local communities, preventing them from simply spectating the influx of new economic activities. A similar view was expressed by Mr. Rahman (46) , a fisherman . He explained that the road has made it easier to distribute fresh fish to the market, resulting in better selling prices than before. However, he noted that the increased access has also led to an increase in traders from outside the

area, who are starting to compete with local residents for the village's economic resources.

These findings demonstrate that the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road not only resulted in physical changes but also shaped diverse social narratives at the community level. The government views development as a symbol of progress and equality, while the community interprets development through everyday experiences, encompassing benefits, challenges, hopes, and concerns about the future of their village. These differing perspectives demonstrate that development is an arena that brings together diverse interests, experiences, and social interpretations.

From a development anthropology perspective, development narratives are crucial to study because they not only explain development goals but also shape how communities understand the changes that occur. Road infrastructure can be a symbol of modernity, but it also serves as a space for negotiation between the interests of the state, local communities, and various economic actors involved in the development process. Therefore, understanding development solely through physical indicators such as road length or budget size is inadequate. More important is understanding how communities experience, interpret, and respond to development in their daily lives.

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the narrative of the Batabual Cross-Island Road development in Buru Regency, focusing on the perspective of the Ilath Village community. The study seeks to explain how development is understood by the community, how social changes emerge after development takes place, and how infrastructure development shapes new relationships between the state, society, and local living spaces. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of development anthropology studies, while also providing considerations for the government in formulating more participatory, equitable, and sustainable infrastructure development policies.

Literature Review

In recent years, studies of infrastructure development have shifted their focus from technical and economic aspects to policy effectiveness, but have expanded to analyze how development is produced as a narrative that shapes the relationships between the state, society, and space. This shift demonstrates that infrastructure development is a social phenomenon that cannot be understood solely through physical indicators such as road length, investment volume, or economic growth. Infrastructure is also an arena where processes of

negotiation of meaning, distribution of power, social change, and the formation of community identity take place.

In contemporary anthropological studies, Djufri's (2025) research on the anthropology of infrastructure in Makassar City shows that infrastructure development is often positioned as a symbol of urban progress, but in practice, it also results in unequal access, social exclusion, and forms of societal adaptation to new spaces created by the state. This research emphasizes that infrastructure is not a neutral space, but rather a product of social relations influenced by political and economic interests.

Kregg Hetherington, in his study of the anthropology of infrastructure, explains that the construction of roads, bridges, and public facilities is always built around a narrative of a better future. Infrastructure is produced as a promise of development, linking public expectations for economic progress with the legitimacy of government policies. Thus, infrastructure not only transforms physical space but also shapes collective imaginations about a region's future.

In the Indonesian context, Kim (2023) explains that infrastructure development is a key national strategy to accelerate economic growth and strengthen state capacity. However, infrastructure development is not solely driven by technocratic considerations, but rather influenced by political dynamics, institutions, and the interests of various actors involved in the development process. In other words, infrastructure development is the result of the interaction between state policies, economic interests, and public responses.

Ekayanta's (2019) research on the discourse on infrastructure development during the Joko Widodo administration shows that infrastructure development is constructed through an ideological narrative that positions the state as the primary actor in creating public welfare. This discourse not only serves as a basis for legitimizing development policies but also as a mechanism for gaining public support for infrastructure projects. However, the study also found that the development narrative often obscures the problems faced by affected communities, creating a gap between the development discourse and the social reality on the ground.

A study of infrastructure discourse in Indonesia was also conducted by Suhandano et al. (2024), who analyzed how the mass media framed infrastructure development. The results showed that the media predominantly portrayed development as a symbol of economic progress, while issues regarding ecological and social impacts tended to be relegated to secondary positions. This suggests that development narratives are produced through a process of information selection that strengthens development's legitimacy while limiting the scope for criticism of its impacts.

These various studies demonstrate a tendency to understand infrastructure development as a social process that produces diverse consequences for people's lives. However, most research still focuses on urban areas, industrial areas, or national-scale development projects. Research on road construction narratives in island regions, particularly in Buru Regency, is still very limited. Furthermore, previous research has primarily analyzed development from the perspective of government policy, while relatively little has been done to examine how local communities construct meanings around infrastructure development.

Therefore, this research is novel because it positions the Ilath Village community as the primary subject in understanding the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road. This research not only examines the impact of development but also examines how the government constructs the development narrative and how that narrative is received, interpreted, negotiated, and even questioned by the community in their daily lives.

Narrative is the way a reality is constructed, structured, and conveyed to produce specific meaning. In the context of development, narrative is not only the language used by the government to explain a policy, but also encompasses symbols, planning documents, political speeches, mass media , and development practices that shape how society understands change. The narrative of infrastructure development is essentially a representation of how a country defines progress, prosperity, and modernization. Roads, bridges, ports, and other infrastructure are viewed not only as physical objects but also as symbols of progress, reflecting the success of a region's development.

Therefore, infrastructure development is always accompanied by a narrative of equitable development, improved public welfare, poverty reduction, increased connectivity, and the opening of new economic opportunities. From a social science perspective, development narratives are dynamic because they are influenced by various actors with differing interests. The government constructs development narratives to legitimize its policies. Conversely, communities interpret development based on the concrete experiences they encounter in their daily lives. As a result, development can be interpreted as an opportunity, a threat, a hope, or a form of change that simultaneously brings social, economic, cultural, and environmental consequences. Thus, road construction cannot be understood only as the construction of transportation facilities, but as a social space that brings together various interests of the state, society and the market in shaping the lives of local communities.

The main theoretical basis of this research is the anthropological theory of development proposed by Arturo Escobar. In his landmark work, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (1995), Escobar criticized

the conventional development paradigm, which views development as a universal process toward modernity. According to Escobar, development is not simply a set of economic programs, but rather a discourse that has historically shaped how states, international institutions, and societies understand poverty, underdevelopment, and progress.

Escobar argues that since the end of World War II, the concept of the "developing country" has been shaped through language, knowledge, statistics, policies, and various development institutions. Through this process, societies around the world have been positioned as objects to be developed according to standards of modernity determined by the state and international development institutions. Thus, development is not a neutral reality, but rather a social construction that produces specific categories of progress, poverty, and well-being.

In the context of this research, the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road is understood as part of the government's development discourse aimed at bringing modernization, connectivity, and economic growth to the eastern region of Buru Regency. However, the people of Ilath Village do not necessarily accept this narrative in its entirety. They interpret development based on their own social experiences, thus interpreting it as an economic opportunity while simultaneously bringing about changes in social relations, spatial use, and environmental sustainability. Escobar's approach provides space to see that development does not only produce physical changes in the form of roads, but also forms a new identity for society, a way of looking at living space, and a new relationship between society and the state.

The second theory used in this research is the theory of discourse and power developed by Michel Foucault. For Foucault, discourse is not simply language or communication, but rather a system of knowledge that determines how reality is understood, explained, and legitimized. Discourse produces knowledge, while knowledge forms the basis for the formation of practices of power. Therefore, the relationship between knowledge and power is mutually constitutive (power/knowledge). From Foucault's perspective, development can be understood as a regime of knowledge that defines what constitutes underdeveloped areas, isolated regions, poor communities, and indicators of progress. Through planning documents, government speeches, the mass media , and various development programs, the state produces a narrative that road construction is the solution to various social and economic problems. This discourse is then accepted as truth, influencing how society views development.

However, Foucault also emphasized that power is never absolute. Within every power relationship, there is always room for negotiation, adaptation, and

resistance. Therefore, society is not only an object of development, but also a subject with the ability to interpret, accept, modify, and even critique development narratives based on their experiences. In this study, Foucault's theory is used to analyze how the narrative of the Batabual CrossIsland Road development was produced by the government through various discourses on progress, connectivity, and welfare, as well as how the Ilath Village community constructed a counter-narrative based on their experiences of social, economic, cultural, and environmental changes after the road was built.

By combining the perspectives of Arturo Escobar and Michel Foucault, this study views infrastructure development not merely as a physical project, but as an arena for the production of meaning involving the relationship between knowledge, power, and community experience. This theoretical framework allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how the construction of the Batabual Crossroad is understood as both a symbol of modernization by the state and a social experience continually negotiated by the people of Ilath Village.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design . The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand in depth how the Ilath Village community interprets the construction of the Batabual Cross Road as a social process that is not only related to physical development, but also involves changes in lifestyles, social relations, economic activities, and community relations with the state. The ethnographic approach is used to obtain a comprehensive picture of the community's experiences, perceptions, and social practices in responding to infrastructure development through the direct involvement of researchers in the field. With this approach, researchers not only collect information about the impact of development, but also explore the meanings that the community gives to development based on daily experiences.

The research was conducted in Ilath Village, Batabual District, Buru Regency, Maluku Province . The location was selected purposively, considering that Ilath Village is one of the villages that experienced significant changes following the construction of the Batabual CrossIsland Road. Before the road was built, residents relied primarily on sea transportation to reach government centers and markets. After the road was built, population mobility increased, distribution of agricultural and fishery products became smoother, and the intensity of interaction with other regions increased. These changes make Ilath Village a relevant location for examining the narrative of infrastructure development from the perspective of the local community.

The research subjects consisted of fifteen informants selected using purposive sampling. This technique was used because the research required informants with knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the construction process of the Batabual Cross-Island Road. Informants came from various social groups, allowing for diverse perspectives on infrastructure development. They included village heads, village officials, traditional leaders, religious leaders, community leaders, fishermen, farmers, business people, women, youth, and residents living along the Batabual Cross-Island Road.

Research data was obtained through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary analysis. Interviews were conducted semi-structured to provide researchers with a guideline for questions and to provide informants with space to explain their experiences, views, and knowledge more broadly. Interviews focused on community perceptions regarding the construction of the Batabual Crossroad, changes experienced after construction, economic and social benefits gained, changes in community relations with the environment, and community expectations for the sustainability of the development. All interviews were conducted directly at the research location, with attention to the comfort of the informants and with their consent obtained before the data collection process began.

Observations were conducted through a participatory approach, observing the physical condition of the road, community activities along the infrastructure, population mobility, trade activities, spatial utilization, and various forms of social interaction that developed after the road's construction. Through these observations, researchers obtained empirical data on changes occurring in the field and triangulated information obtained through interviews. Observations also enabled researchers to understand the social and cultural context of the Ilath Village community, which cannot be fully explained through conversations with informants. In addition to interviews and observations, this study utilized documentation techniques as a supporting data source. The documents reviewed included regional development planning documents, the Ilath Village profile, and government reports on infrastructure development, village archives, photographs of development activities, area maps, and various other documents related to the construction of the Batabual Cross-Border Road. Documentation was used to strengthen field findings and provide historical context regarding the development process taking place in the study area.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with the data collection process using an interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The analysis process includes data reduction , data presentation , and drawing and verifying conclusions . In the data reduction stage, researchers

selected, simplified, grouped, and coded interview results, observation notes, and research documents based on themes related to development narratives, social change, economic impacts, cultural change, and the relationship between society and the environment. This stage aims to produce organized data to facilitate the interpretation process. The next stage is the presentation of data in the form of narrative descriptions organized according to thematic categories. Data presentation is carried out by integrating the results of interviews, observations, and documentation so that the relationships between phenomena can be fully understood. Interview excerpts are used to strengthen the researcher's interpretation while also presenting the voices of the community as the main subjects of the research. Through systematic data presentation, researchers can identify patterns of change, similarities and differences in perspectives among informants, and social dynamics that arise as a consequence of the construction of the Batabual Cross-Border Road.

The final stage of analysis is drawing and verifying conclusions. Conclusions are not formulated linearly at the end of the study, but are continually tested throughout the data collection and analysis process. Researchers compare various sources of information to ensure consistency of findings and avoid biased interpretations. The verification process involves rereading interview transcripts, comparing them with field observations, and analyzing documents, ensuring a high level of reliability in the conclusions. To ensure the validity of the data , this study applies source triangulation , technical triangulation , and time triangulation techniques . Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from various categories of informants, such as village officials, community leaders, fishermen, farmers, women, and youth. Technical triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation so that each finding can be verified through more than one data source. Meanwhile, time triangulation is carried out by collecting data at different times to obtain a more consistent picture of community activities and experiences.

The analysis in this study uses Arturo Escobar's perspective on development as a discourse that shapes how society understands modernization, progress, and prosperity. This perspective iscombined with Michel Foucault's theory on the relationship between discourse and power to analyze how the narrative of the Batabual Crossroad development is produced through government policy, then accepted, negotiated, or questioned by the people of Ilath Village based on their experiences in their daily lives. The use of these two perspectives allows this study not only to explain the impact of infrastructure

development, but also to reveal the process of meaning-making that occurs behind the development practice itself.

This research also adheres to ethical principles of social research. Prior to the interviews, each informant was provided with an explanation of the research objectives, the expected form of participation, and their right to terminate the interview at any time. Informant consent was obtained voluntarily, and all personal identities have been disguised in the article to maintain confidentiality and protect their privacy. By applying these ethical principles, the research is expected to produce valid data while respecting the rights and dignity of each research participant.

Results and Discussion

Government Narrative on the Construction of the Batabual Cross-Bandung Road

The construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road is a strategic infrastructure program within Buru Regency's development agenda. It is designed to connect the east coast, including Ilath Village in Batabual District, with the government center in Namlea and other areas on Buru Island. Various regional development planning documents position road construction as a key tool for addressing regional isolation, accelerating economic growth, improving the quality of public services, and strengthening inter-regional integration. Therefore, the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road is viewed not only as a physical project but also as a demonstration of the government's success in achieving equitable development.

The research results show that the government's narrative regarding the Batabual CrossBorder Road centers on three main themes: regional connectivity, improving community welfare, and accelerating economic development . These three themes emerged consistently in interviews with village officials, community leaders, and development documents analyzed during the study. Based on observations, road construction has significantly altered community mobility patterns.

Before the road was built, most of the Ilath Village community's transportation depended on sea routes, which were heavily influenced by weather conditions. During the easterly wind season or when waves were high, shipping was often delayed, hindering the distribution of agricultural and fishery products. This resulted in high transportation costs, uncertain travel times, and limited access to education and health services. The existence of the Batabual Crossroad brought fundamental changes to these conditions. The community now has a more stable land transportation alternative, significantly increasing the mobility of goods and people. Trade activities have also become more

dynamic, as agricultural, plantation, and fishery products can be marketed to Namlea in a shorter time. Thus, the road's construction symbolizes a change that is tangible and felt by the community. The results of an interview with the Head of Ilath Village, Mr. Ahmad Masbait (52 years old) showed that road construction was seen as a form of government attention to coastal communities.

> "We used to feel quite far from the district center. If there was government business or a sick member of the community, we relied on sea transportation. Now, people can travel by land, making life much easier. We see this road as a step forward for the village." (Interview,February 12, 2026).

This statement demonstrates that the village government equates road construction with improving the quality of public services. Infrastructure is seen as a prerequisite for communities to gain better access to various basic services. From the government's perspective, development success is measured not only by the availability of roads, but also by increased community mobility and the streamlining of village governance.

A similar view was expressed by Ms. Siti (44), a village official involved in the development coordination process. According to her, the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road is part of the government's efforts to reduce the development gap between coastal areas and the district center.

> "People used to think Batabual was far away, but that's no longer the case. Roads make people feel closer to Namlea. Many necessities that were once difficult to obtain are now easier because vehicles can enter every day." (Interview, February 13, 2026).

The results of the interview show that the government is building a narrative about closeness. As a consequence of infrastructure development, roads are positioned as a medium connecting previously separated spaces. This narrative reinforces the view that infrastructure development is both an instrument of regional integration and a symbol of the state's presence in people's lives. Field findings also indicate that road construction is accompanied by increased other development activities, such as improvements to educational facilities, health services, electricity networks, and telecommunications. Village officials view road construction as a gateway to various subsequent development programs. In other words, roads are seen not only as a development objective, but as basic infrastructure that facilitates the entry of various forms of government and private investment.

Table 1.
Government Narrative regarding the Construction of the Batabual Cross-Bandung Road.

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Development Narrative	*Emphasized Goals*	*Field Findings*
Regional connectivity	Connecting villages with district centers	Community mobility increases and travel time decreases
Equitable development	Reducing the isolation of coastal areas	Access to education, health and government becomes easier
Economic growth	Facilitate the distribution of agricultural and fishery products	Trading activity increased and transportation costs decreased
Public service	Facilitating access to basic services	The frequency of people's travel has increased significantly

Although the government's narrative highlights the numerous benefits of development, observations indicate that implementation still faces a number of challenges. In some areas, road conditions require regular maintenance due to the region's topography and high rainfall. Some residents also hope that road construction will be accompanied by improvements in the quality of public transportation so that the benefits of development can be more evenly distributed among all residents.

These findings demonstrate that the development narrative doesn't stop at the completion of physical projects, but extends to how the infrastructure is managed sustainably. In several interviews, residents emphasized that the existence of roads will provide optimal benefits if supported by consistent government policies on infrastructure maintenance, transportation service provision, and local economic development.

From Arturo Escobar's perspective, the government's narrative regarding the Batabual Crossing Road can be understood as part of a development discourse that positions infrastructure as a symbol of modernization and progress. Through various development documents, official speeches, and government programs, the road is constructed as a solution to the problems of isolation, poverty, and underdevelopment. Within this framework, development produces a particular perspective on what constitutes developed and underdeveloped regions. Ilath Village is then positioned as an area that needs to be "opened up" through infrastructure development to enable it to participate in the national development process.

Thus, the government's narrative regarding the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road successfully fostered optimism regarding regional progress,

while simultaneously opening up space for new interpretations from the community. Road infrastructure became more than just a means of transportation; it became a symbol of social change, bringing together the state's hopes for modernization and the community's lived experiences. This analysis provides the basis for understanding how the official government narrative was accepted, adapted, or even challenged by the Ilath Village community, as discussed in the following section.

Ilath Village Community Narratives on Infrastructure Development

Research findings indicate that the Ilath Village community does not interpret the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road in a singular way. Unlike the government's narrative, which emphasizes development as an indicator of policy success and economic growth, the community constructs a narrative based on their daily experiences since the road began operating. These experiences include ease of mobility, increased economic activity, changes in social interaction patterns, and concerns about environmental changes and the influx of influences from outside the village. Thus, the community's narrative is multidimensional, born from empirical experience, not solely from development discourse produced by the government.

Based on the results of interviews with fifteen informants, it was found that there were three main narratives that developed in the Ilath Village community, namely: (1) roads as access to a better life, (2) roads as a space for the growth of economic opportunities, and (3) roads as a trigger for social and cultural change.

The first and most dominant narrative is that the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road is seen as a means of improving the community's quality of life. Most informants stated that before the road was built, they experienced difficulties accessing public services. Travel to Namlea depended on sea transportation, which was affected by weather conditions, often hampering economic activity and social needs. A community leader, Mr. Hasan (58 years old), explained that the most obvious change felt by the community was the reduction in travel time to the district capital.

> "Previously, we had to wait for good weather before we could leave. If the waves were big, everything would be delayed. Now, people can use land transportation, which makes things quicker. It's also easier to take sick people to the hospital." (Interview, February 14, 2026).

This statement demonstrates that people view roads not only as a means of transportation, but also as infrastructure that provides a sense of security in their daily lives. Ease of access to hospitals, schools, government offices, and markets is perceived as improving the quality of life that was previously difficult to

achieve. Field observations show that the intensity of vehicles passing through Ilath Village has increased compared to before the road was built. Private cars, freight vehicles, and motorcycles have become increasingly common modes of transportation. Travel to Namlea, previously limited to specific times, is now possible almost daily. This situation reinforces the public's perception that the road has shortened the social and geographic distance between the village and the center of government.

Besides improving mobility, the community views road construction as opening up new economic opportunities. Before the roads were built, the distribution of agricultural, plantation, and fishery products required relatively high transportation costs. Once the roads were in place, distribution costs decreased, allowing the community to reap greater economic benefits. Mr. Rahman (Fisherman, 46 years old) explained that road access has a direct impact on fishermen's income.

> "Now fish can be transported quickly to Namlea. Previously, when the weather was bad, the fish sometimes couldn't be sold, resulting in lower quality. Now that the road is built, the catch reaches the market more quickly." (Interview, February 15, 2026).

A similar view was expressed by Mrs. Nur (41 years old), a trader who opened a small business on the edge of Jalan Lintas Batabual.

> "Before the road was as busy as it is now, there weren't many customers. Now, vehicles pass by every day, so our shop is busier. The family income has also increased." (Interview, February 16, 2026).

The findings indicate that road construction has created new economic opportunities in Ilath Village. Not only farmers and fishermen benefit, but also small businesses capitalize on the increased mobility. Observations indicate that kiosks, food stalls, repair shops, and transportation services have sprung up along the road, businesses that had previously not seen significant growth. However, some informants also stated that increased accessibility has brought the consequence of attracting traders from outside the village. Business competition has become more open, requiring local communities to improve the quality of their products and services to compete.

In addition to economic changes, the community also experienced changes in social life. Road construction increased the frequency of interaction between the people of Ilath Village and those from other areas. Increased mobility accelerated the exchange of information, culture, and lifestyles. A traditional figure disguised by the name Mr. Yusuf Biloro (65 years old) said that the changes brought both benefits and challenges.

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"We're happy because the village is more developed now. But we also hope the children will maintain their traditions and respect their elders. We shouldn't let progress lead to the gradual loss of the values passed down from our ancestors." (Interview, February 17, 2026).

This statement demonstrates that development is viewed as a process that not only transforms physical space but also impacts the value systems within a community. Traditional leaders acknowledge the benefits of development but also emphasize the importance of maintaining cultural identity amidst increasing interaction with the outside world. A different view was expressed by Brother Arif (27 years old) , a young man from Ilath Village.

"I think the road opens up wider opportunities. It's easier for us to take training, go to college, or find work outside the village. But the challenge is how to maintain our own culture." (Interview, February 18, 2026).

Differences in views between generations demonstrate that development is interpreted differently. Younger generations tend to view roads as a symbol of opportunity and social mobility, while older generations emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance between progress and cultural preservation.

Table 2.
Ilath Village Community Perceptions of the Construction of the Batabual Cross-Bandung Road

Narrative Theme	*Public Perception*	*Impact Felt*
Accessibility	Roads make it easier for people to move around	Travel time is reduced, access to public services is increased
Economy	The road opens up business opportunities and accelerates the distribution of production results	People's income increases, new businesses emerge
Socio-cultural	Ways to expand interaction with outside communities	There are changes in interaction patterns and lifestyles
Environment	The road opens access to forest areas	Concerns arise regarding the exploitation of natural resources

The research results show that the community's narrative regarding the Batabual Cross-Island Road development is more complex than the one developed by the government. While the government positions development as an indicator of regional success, the community interprets it through practical and reflective everyday experiences. They acknowledge the benefits of the road in increasing mobility, improving the economy, and expanding access to public services. However, they also recognize that development brings social changes that require adaptability to avoid eliminating the local values that have long been the foundation of the Ilath Village community.

These findings demonstrate that communities are not passive recipients of development. They actively interpret, evaluate, and assign meaning to development based on their experiences. The narratives emerging at the community level demonstrate that infrastructure development is a social process that generates diverse interpretations, not simply the implementation of government policy.

The results of this study align with Hetherington's study, which states that infrastructure always carries a "promise of development," but the meaning of that promise is determined by the experiences of the people living around the infrastructure. In the context of Ilath Village, roads do open up opportunities for a better life, but at the same time, they present new challenges that the community must face, both in the economic, social, cultural, and environmental spheres. Thus, the narrative of the Ilath Village community shows that the construction of the Batabual Cross Road is a transformation process that not only produces physical changes, but also shapes the way the community understands the future, gives meaning to their living space, and formulates strategies to maintain local identity amidst the increasingly rapid flow of change.

The Street as a Symbol of Modernity: An Analysis from Arturo Escobar's Perspective

The research findings show that the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road is not merely understood as providing transportation, but has shaped the way the Ilath Village community interprets the development, progress, and future of their region. Roads are no longer positioned solely as physical infrastructure connecting one region to another, but rather as symbols of modernity that bring hope for social change and improved well-being. This perception develops as the community increases access to public services, markets, education, health care, and various economic activities that were previously difficult to reach. Thus, road construction brings about a transformation that is not only material, but also influences how the community imagines a better life.

In Arturo Escobar's (1995) perspective, development is essentially a discourse, which shapes how society understands social reality. Development does not exist as a neutral process, but rather as a knowledge system that produces concepts of progress, underdevelopment, modernization, and prosperity. Through various policies, planning documents, and development programs, the state builds an understanding that infrastructure development is the primary solution to the various problems faced by society. In other words, development produces a certain way of thinking that is then accepted as normal and undeniable.

Research findings in Ilath Village demonstrate that this narrative emerged through the construction of the Batabual Cross-Island Road. The government positioned the road as a symbol of progress, capable of opening up the isolated eastern coastal areas of Buru Regency. Narratives of connectivity, equitable development, and improved welfare were consistently conveyed through regional development programs. In this context, the road was understood not only as a means of mobility but also as a representation of the success of regional development and the presence of the state in meeting the needs of the community. However, interviews revealed that the community did not passively accept the development narrative.

They constructed the meaning of development based on their lived experiences after the road began operating. For the community, the road provided tangible benefits in the form of easier transportation, increased trade activity, opened up business opportunities, and easier access to education and health services. However, the community also recognized that these changes had consequences, including an increased influx of immigrants, increased economic competition, changes in social interaction patterns, and a shift in some local cultural values. This view is evident in the statement of Mr. Hasan (58 years old), a community leader of Ilath Village, who stated that the road construction has brought progress to the village, but the community must also be prepared to face the changes that accompany the development. This statement shows that the community does not only see development as a mere economic benefit, but also as a process of social transformation that requires the ability to adapt without losing the cultural identity that has been passed down through generations.

Within Escobar's framework, the experience of the Ilath Village community illustrates that development always produces two interrelated aspects. On the one hand, development offers the promise of progress, efficiency, and prosperity. On the other hand, development also creates changes in social structures, ways of life, and people's relationships with space and the environment. Therefore, development cannot be understood solely through physical indicators such as

the length of roads or the size of allocated budgets, but must be seen as a social process that shapes how communities understand themselves and the future of their region. Field observations corroborate these findings. Since the Batabual Crossroad was operational, community mobility has increased significantly. Economic activity has expanded through the addition of kiosks, food stalls, transportation services, and the trade of agricultural and fishery products.

These changes indicate that the road has become a new space for community economic activity. However, observations also revealed increased access to previously relatively inaccessible forest areas and natural resources. This situation has raised community concerns about the potential exploitation of natural resources if not balanced with adequate oversight. Thus, the symbol of modernity inherent in road construction presents not only opportunities but also challenges for environmental sustainability.

The findings of this study align with Escobar's view that development often shapes how communities define progress based on indicators introduced by the state. In the context of Ilath Village, ease of transportation, increased economic activity, and open access to the center of government are perceived as signs that the village has entered a more advanced phase than before. However, the community still places values of togetherness, kinship, and environmental sustainability as inseparable from the meaning of development itself. This indicates that the community is adapting to modernity without completely abandoning its local value system. Thus, the construction of the Batabual Crossroad can be understood as a symbol of modernity that connects the people of Ilath Village to various development opportunities, while simultaneously presenting a complex process of social transformation.

Arturo Escobar's perspective shows that development is not merely physical development, but rather a discourse that shapes how people understand progress, prosperity, and the future. In this study, the people of Ilath Village are not merely objects of development, but rather actors who actively interpret, negotiate, and give meaning to development based on their own life experiences. Therefore, the success of infrastructure development is not only measured by the availability of roads as physical facilities, but also by the extent to which development is able to improve the quality of life of the community without eliminating the cultural identity and environmental sustainability that are the foundation of local community life.

Development Narrative as a Discourse of Power: Michel Foucault's Analysis

The construction of the Batabual Crossroad can be understood not only as a physical development project, but also as part of a discourse production process

that shapes how society understands development, progress, and prosperity. The research results show that the government constructed a narrative regarding the Batabual Crossroad as a symbol of progress, equitable development, and improving the quality of life of the community. This narrative was conveyed through various planning documents, regional development programs, and communication between the government and the community throughout the development process. Thus, the road construction not only resulted in changes to the physical space but also shaped the community's mindset regarding the importance of infrastructure as a prerequisite for development.

Research findings indicate that the narrative was accepted by the majority of the Ilath Village community because they experienced direct benefits from the construction of the Batabual CrossIsland Road. The community acknowledged that access to Namlea has become easier, transportation costs have decreased, the distribution of agricultural and fishery products has become smoother, and health and education services have become more accessible. From Foucault's perspective, this condition demonstrates how a discourse gains power because it is supported by the empirical experiences of the community. In other words, the development discourse becomes effective not solely because it is produced by the state, but also because the community finds concrete evidence that strengthens the discourse's legitimacy in everyday life.

However, the research also shows that the community has not accepted the development narrative completely without criticism. In various interviews, informants stated that while road construction brings benefits, it also creates new problems they had not previously faced. Several informants mentioned increased influx of migrants into Ilath Village, increased economic competition, changes in social interaction patterns, and concerns about forest exploitation. These conditions indicate that the community has developed its own interpretation of development based on their experiences since the road's operation. For example, Mr. Amir (Farmer , 54 years old) , explained that road construction does make it easier for people to sell their garden produce, but at the same time opens up wider access for outsiders to utilize natural resources around the village.

> "It's easier to sell garden produce now because the roads are better. But we're also seeing outsiders increasingly entering the forest area. If we don't protect it, the forest, which has been a source of livelihood for the community, could be destroyed." (Interview, February 18, 2026).

This statement demonstrates that society is not simply repeating the government's narrative about the benefits of development but is also generating alternative discourses based on their own experiences. From Foucault's perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that every power relationship

always opens up space for the emergence of new knowledge. Society is not a passive object simply accepting government policies, but rather a subject with the ability to interpret, evaluate, and even critique the impacts of development based on the realities they face. Same thing can be seen from the interview with Mr. Yusuf Biloro (65 year old traditional figure) , who said that development should not only be oriented towards physical development, but also pay attention to the sustainability of the community's cultural values.

> "We support road construction because the community benefits from it. However, development must also preserve the traditions, forests, and family ties that have long been the strength of the Ilath Village community." (Interview, February 17, 2026).

This statement demonstrates a form of negotiation within the development narrative. Traditional leaders do not reject development, but rather seek to broaden its meaning beyond its sole focus on economic growth. In this context, communities are producing a counter-discourse that positions cultural and environmental sustainability as integral to development itself.

Field observations further substantiate these findings. Following the road's construction, community mobility increased, economic activity expanded, and access to various public services became easier. However, observations also revealed changes in village spatial planning, increased trade from outside the region, and increased use of forest areas around the road. These changes are not entirely viewed negatively by the community, but rather are understood as consequences that must be managed collectively to prevent development from creating new inequalities in the future.

The findings of this study also demonstrate that power in development does not operate through coercion, but rather through shaping the community's mindset about what constitutes good development. When communities accept that roads are a primary need for village progress, they simultaneously begin to develop new expectations of the government, such as improving the quality of public services, developing the local economy, protecting forest areas, and preserving local culture. In other words, road construction has created a reciprocal relationship between the government and the community that is continually negotiated through everyday experiences.

Based on this analysis, it can be understood that the construction of the Batabual Crossroad is not merely infrastructure development, but also a process of discourse formation that produces various forms of new knowledge regarding the progress, welfare, and future of Ilath Village. Michel Foucault's perspective shows that society is not only the recipient of development policies, but also actors who actively produce meaning, provide criticism, and build alternative

discourses regarding development. Therefore, the success of development is not only determined by the success of the provision of physical infrastructure, but also by the government's ability to create a dialogue space that allows society to participate in defining the direction of development according to their needs, cultural values, and social conditions. Thus, development becomes a participatory and reflective process, not merely the implementation of top-down policies.

Conclusion

This study shows that the construction of the Batabual Crossroad in Ilath Village, Batabual District, Buru Regency is not only a physical infrastructure development aimed at improving regional connectivity, but also a social process that shapes how people interpret development, modernity, and change in their lives. For the government, road construction is positioned as a symbol of equitable development, increased accessibility, and accelerated economic growth. Meanwhile, the community interprets development based on empirical experiences they feel in their daily lives. The presence of the Batabual Crossroad has provided tangible benefits in the form of increased population mobility, opened access to education and health services, smoother distribution of agricultural and fishery products, and the development of various economic activities that contribute to improving community welfare. However, development also brings social consequences in the form of increased economic competition, changes in social interaction patterns, increased cultural influences from outside, and the emergence of concerns about environmental sustainability due to increasingly open access to forest areas and natural resources.

Analysis using Arturo Escobar's perspective shows that the construction of the Batabual Crossroad is part of a development discourse that shapes how society understands the concepts of progress and prosperity. Road infrastructure is not only seen as a means of transportation, but also as a symbol of modernity that brings change to various aspects of community life. On the other hand, Michel Foucault's perspective shows that development is an arena for the production of discourse that involves the relationship between knowledge and power. In this context, the people of Ilath Village are not merely objects of development, but play a role as subjects who actively interpret, respond to, and negotiate the meaning of development based on their experiences, needs, and local values.

The main finding (novelty) of this research is that the Batabual Crossroad functions not only as a connectivity infrastructure but also as a social negotiation space that brings together the state's narrative of modernization with the

community's narrative of the sustainability of local life. This finding confirms that the success of infrastructure development cannot be measured solely by physical indicators or economic growth, but also by its ability to maintain a balance between economic development, social cohesion, cultural preservation, community participation, and environmental sustainability. Based on these findings, this study recommends that the Buru Regency Government adopt a more participatory approach to infrastructure development, involving the community from the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. Furthermore, road construction needs to be integrated with community economic empowerment programs, local cultural preservation, and sustainable environmental management to ensure the benefits of development are more equitable and maintain the social, cultural, and ecological sustainability of the Batabual area.

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