

# *The Trans-Java Toll Road as Neoliberal Spatial Fix: Economic Restructuring and MSME Marginalization*

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## Abstract

This article critically examines the socio-spatial impact of the Trans-Java Toll Road on Java's northern coastal region, also known in Indonesian as Pantura, with a focus on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). While promoted as a solution for improving logistics and economic growth, the toll road exemplifies a neoliberal spatial fix that unevenly redistributes development. Drawing on David Harvey's concepts of "spatial fix" and "uneven geographical development", this study explores how infrastructure megaprojects privilege specific spaces while displacing others. Using a critical-qualitative approach grounded in "critical realism", the research analyses curated secondary data, policy documents, statistical releases, academic studies, and news reports through hybrid thematic analysis. Findings reveal that MSMEs along the Pantura corridor face declining income, reduced visibility, and business closures, while toll-exit zones attract concentrated investment and land speculation. This spatial reordering illustrates the contradictions of capital-driven infrastructure, which deepens regional inequality and marginalizes historically embedded economies. This study argues for inclusive planning that recognizes the non-neutrality of infrastructure and prioritizes spatial justice. Furthermore, contributes to broader debates on infrastructure, dispossession, and development in post-authoritarian Indonesia and the Global South.

Keywords: Displacement, Infrastructure, MSMEs, Pantura, Spatial Fix



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Trans-Java Toll Road, spanning 1,187 kilometers across Indonesia's most populous island, has been heralded as a transformative infrastructure initiative aimed at enhancing national connectivity, streamlining logistics, and fostering regional development.<sup>1</sup> As outlined in the *National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024*, the toll road forms part of Indonesia's ambition to construct an additional 2,500 kilometers of expressways nationwide, underlining infrastructure as the backbone of economic modernization.<sup>2</sup> According to the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing (PUPR), by 2022, 1,056 kilometers of the Trans-Java network had become operational, with a total planned reach of 1,167 kilometers under the National Strategic Projects framework.<sup>3</sup> These efforts, accompanied by policy pushes for accelerated completion, reflect the state's techno-developmental vision that positions infrastructure as a neutral, apolitical solution to national challenges.

Indonesia was not alone in this development strategy. Massive road development is also being implemented in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Vietnam and Indonesia represent the most instructive Southeast Asian comparison in infrastructure-led spatial fixes, as both deploy expressway megaprojects serving export-oriented manufacturing while systematically destroying friction-dependent informal economies. Vietnam's North-South Expressway, projected to be built between 2017 and 2025, mirrors Indonesia's Trans-Java toll road, approximately an 1,811 km route connecting Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City by bypassing Highway 1, replicating Indonesia's high-speed corridor strategy. This project reveals how expressways serve the circulation of transnational capital rather than domestic needs.<sup>5</sup> However, Vietnam's authoritarian control enables more brutal

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<sup>1</sup> Fahmi Salam Ahmad, 'The Impact of Trans Java Toll Road Construction on Economic Growth in Central Java', *Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Kebijakan Pembangunan* 11, no. 1 (2022): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.29244/jekp.11.1.2022.1-18>; Wirdatul Aini, 'Dampak Pembangunan Tol Trans-Jawa pada Perekonomian', *News*, [kompas.id](https://www.kompas.id), 20 December 2021, <https://www.kompas.id/baca/riset/2021/12/20/dampak-pembangunan-tol-trans-jawa-pada-perekonomian>.

<sup>2</sup> RPJMN, APPENDIX I — *Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2020 Concerning the National Medium-Term Development Plan for 2020–2024*, Government Document Perpres No. 18/2020 (Presiden Republik Indonesia / Bappenas, 2020), [https://perpustakaan.bappenas.go.id/e-library/file\\_upload/koleksi/migrasi-data-publikasi/file/RP\\_RKP/Narasi-RPJMN-2020-2024-versi-Bahasa-Inggris.pdf](https://perpustakaan.bappenas.go.id/e-library/file_upload/koleksi/migrasi-data-publikasi/file/RP_RKP/Narasi-RPJMN-2020-2024-versi-Bahasa-Inggris.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Bina Marga, *The Trans Java Toll Road, starting from Merak to Pasuruan, operates*, Government Report (Direktorat Jenderal Bina Marga - Kementerian PUPR, 2018), <https://binamarga.pu.go.id/index.php/berita/the-trans-java-toll-road-starting-from-merak-to-pasuruan-operates>; Menteri PUPR, *Peraturan Menteri PUPR Nomor 23 Tahun 2020 Tentang Renstra PUPR 2020–2024*, Government Document Permen 23/2020 (Kementerian PUPR, 2020), <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/159653/permen-pupr-no-23-tahun-2020>; Menteri PUPR, *Peraturan Menteri PUPR Nomor 3 Tahun 2024 Tentang Perubahan Renstra PUPR 2020–2024*, Government Document Permen 3/2024 (Kementerian PUPR, 2024), <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/285405/permen-pupr-no-3-tahun-2024>.

<sup>4</sup> Ren Mu and Dominique van de Walle, 'Rural Roads and Local Market Development in Vietnam', *The Journal of Development Studies* 47, no. 5 (2011): 709–34.

<sup>5</sup> Dung Viet Trinh, 'South East Asian Countries' Policies toward a Rising China: Lessons from Vietnam's Hedging Response to the Belt and Road Initiative', *South East Asia Research* 30, no. 2 (2022): 237–54.

implementation through state land decrees without consultation, below-market compensation, and criminalized resistance.

On the other hand, the Philippines provides a closer comparison, given its overlapping democratic structures and oligarchic economies, yet it reveals how weaker state capacity fragments implementation. At the same time, a stronger civil society occasionally forces concessions.<sup>6</sup> Duterte's "Build, Build, Build" program, modeled on Jokowi's strategy, produced similar creative destruction, where *tindahan*, *carinderia*, and *jeepney* terminals collapsed due to bypass-induced traffic loss. Both relied heavily on Chinese Belt and Road financing, homogenizing infrastructure approaches, yet the Philippines' weaker bureaucratic capacity meant incomplete implementation. In contrast, Indonesia's stronger SOE coordination enabled the systematic completion of the Trans-Java project.

Vulnerability patterns are nearly identical: approximately 60% informal employment means toll roads disproportionately destroy friction-dependent livelihoods, sharing spatial embeddedness, capital immobility, and traffic-pattern dependence. The Philippines' stronger remittance economy (10% of GDP versus Indonesia's 1%) provides household resilience absent in Indonesian *warung* operators, who face the risk of complete collapse. Resistance diverges significantly in the Philippines' contentious democracy, and a stronger civil society generated opposition, occasionally forcing compensation concessions, while Indonesia's controlled democracy. Indonesia's experience reflects broader patterns in Southeast Asia. At the same time, its specific combination—hybrid authoritarianism, a significant manufacturing sector, a massive informal economy, and a weak civil society—produces particularly effective infrastructure-led creative destruction that marginalizes MSMEs and vulnerable populations as an essential mechanism through which reformasi Indonesia integrates into global capitalism.

Given the widespread situation in other countries, as well as in Indonesia, this article challenges techno-optimism by arguing that the toll road constitutes a neoliberal spatial fix—a state-facilitated reconfiguration of territory in the service of capital accumulation. Drawing on David Harvey's conceptualizations of *spatial fix* and *uneven geographical development*<sup>7</sup>, we examine how infrastructure, while celebrated for its integrative qualities, often produces new dislocations and exclusions by privileging specific spaces and actors over others.

Historically, Java's northern coastal corridor, known as *Pantura*, has served as a dense economic and cultural artery, linking port cities, market towns, and rural peripheries. Originating from the colonial-era *De Grote Postweg* (Anjer-Panaroekan) under

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<sup>6</sup> Wen-Chih Chao, 'The Philippines' Perception and Strategy for China's Belt and Road Initiative Expansion: Hedging with Balancing', *The Chinese Economy* 54, no. 1 (2021): 48–55.

<sup>7</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (University of California Press, 2000); David Harvey, 'Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"', *Geographische Revue: Zeitschrift Für Literatur Und Diskussion* 3, no. 2 (2001): 23–30, <https://d-nb.info/1217929630/34>; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (OUP Oxford, 2007); David Harvey, 'Roepke Lecture in Economic Geography—Crises, Geographic Disruptions and the Uneven Development of Political Responses', *Economic Geography* 87, no. 1 (2011): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-8287.2010.01105.x>.

Daendels<sup>8</sup> and evolving into a vital regional trade axis<sup>9</sup>, *Pantura* developed a bottom-up economic ecology comprising roadside stalls, artisanal industries, and microenterprises. Nevertheless, with the redirection of traffic and investment flows to the longstanding road, this longstanding territorial economy now faces systemic marginalization. As vehicles bypass traditional settlements, land values decline or spike erratically, and economic lifelines fracture, producing not only infrastructural disconnection but also social dislocation.

This study aims to analyze how the construction of the Trans-Java Toll Road has restructured the economic geography of the *Pantura* region, with a particular focus on patterns of spatial displacement, the marginalization of small-scale enterprises, and the reproduction of territorial inequality under neoliberal infrastructure regimes. These shifts are not uncontested. Harvey<sup>10</sup> contends that capitalism solves its crisis of overaccumulation by embedding surplus capital into the built environment, thereby producing uneven development and new contradictions. In this light, infrastructure such as toll roads operates not merely as a logistical apparatus but as an instrument of territorial reordering, privileging urban nodes and formalized capital while displacing informal, small-scale, and locally embedded economies. Emerging toll-based urban enclaves now attract investment and prolonged standing use, while longstanding economic actors along *Pantura* struggle with loss of visibility, declining consumer flow, and, in many cases, collapse.<sup>11</sup>

Recent empirical evidence substantiates these concerns. Hidayat et al.<sup>12</sup> document how toll-centric development reinforces market centralization, Putra<sup>13</sup> reveals the proliferation of capital-intensive retail chains in areas previously dominated by traditional businesses. Similarly, Gandharum et al.<sup>14</sup> trace the loss of agricultural land and rapid spatial commodification in toll-adjacent districts. Meanwhile, MSMEs, which

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<sup>8</sup> Penerbit Buku Kompas, *Ekspedisi Anjer-Panaroean: laporan jurnalistik Kompas : 200 tahun Anjer-Panaroean, jalan untuk perubahan* (Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Endah Sri Hartatik, 'Dari Jalan Pesisir Menjadi Jalan Raya Pantura (Sejarah Jalan Raya Di Pantai Utara Jawa Tengah Abad XX)' (Dissertation Thesis, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2016), <https://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/103224>.

<sup>10</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

<sup>11</sup> Khairul Anam, 'Kematian Ekonomi Jalur Pantura', *Tempo*, 14 April 2023, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/laporan-utama/168595/ekonomi-jalur-pantura>; Herdi Alif Al Hikam, 'Menelusuri Sisa Kejayaan Jalur Pantura yang Habis "Dilalap" Trans Jawa', *detikfinance*, 17 July 2022, <https://finance.detik.com/berita-ekonomi-bisnis/d-6183051/menelusuri-sisa-kejayaan-jalur-pantura-yang-habis-dilalap-trans-jawa>; Kompas, 'Reorganize Economy on Java's Non-Toll Routes', *kompas.id*, 19 June 2018, <https://www.kompas.id/baca/english/2018/06/19/reorganize-economy-on-javas-non-toll-routes/>.

<sup>12</sup> Syarif Hidayat et al., 'Unjust by Default: The Political Economy of Indonesia's Local Government Policy on Infrastructure Development', *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, SAGE Publications, 17 June 2024, 20578911241260442, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911241260442>.

<sup>13</sup> Bayu Maulana Putra, 'Teori Ketimpangan Pembangunan Geografis David Harvey Dalam Tinjauan Filsafat Ekonomi' (Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2022), <http://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/216168>.

<sup>14</sup> Laju Gandharum et al., 'Monitoring Urban Expansion and Loss of Agriculture on the North Coast of West Java Province, Indonesia, Using Google Earth Engine and Intensity Analysis', *The Scientific World Journal* 2022 (January 2022): e3123788, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3123788>.

constitute the backbone of local economies, face significant barriers in adapting to the reterritorialization of circulation and consumption.<sup>15</sup>

This article adopts a critical-qualitative methodology grounded in critical realism<sup>16</sup> to interrogate the spatial and economic transformations unfolding along the *Pantura* corridor. Drawing on a curated body of secondary data, including policy documents, academic studies, journalistic reports, and statistical releases, and employing a hybrid thematic analysis<sup>17</sup>, the study examines how infrastructural megaprojects perpetuate inequality through selective accumulation and dispossession. By foregrounding the logics of displacement and visibility embedded in toll-based development, the article contributes to broader debates on infrastructure, spatial justice, and capitalist modernization in the Global South. It asks: who gains, who is displaced, and how might infrastructure be reimagined to serve not just efficiency, but inclusion and equity?

## II. THE TOLL ROAD AS NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The development of toll road infrastructure in Indonesia, particularly the Trans-Java corridor, has been widely framed as a catalyst for economic integration and logistical modernization. Studies such as Andani et al.<sup>18</sup> underscore how toll roads stimulate induced demand, foster local road expansions, and accelerate peri-urbanization. Econometric analysis Putra<sup>19</sup> demonstrates how toll access boosts the presence of minimarkets while undermining traditional retail, subtly restructuring the urban-rural economic interface. Likewise, Istiqomah et al.<sup>20</sup> identify the emergence of logistics networks that bypass older arterial routes, such as *Pantura*, favoring faster transshipment nodes connected by the toll system.

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<sup>15</sup> Lisna Rahayu and Desiree Marlyn Kipuw, 'The Correlation between Toll Road Development and the Improvement of Local Economy (Case Study: The Soroja Toll Road)', *International Journal of Sustainable Transportation Technology* 3, no. 1 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.31427/IJSTT.2020.3.1.5>; Rasmewahni and Rodi Syafrizal, 'Integration Strategy for Infrastructure Development in MSME Product Marketing Systems in Serdang Bedagai Regency North Sumatra', *International Journal of Economics (IJEC)* 1, no. 1 (2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.55299/ijec.v1i1.133>.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Heeks and P.j. Wall, 'Critical Realism and ICT4D Research', *THE ELECTRONIC JOURNAL OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES* 84, no. 6 (2018): e12051, <https://doi.org/10.1002/isd2.12051>.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Fereday and Eimear Muir-Cochrane, 'Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5, no. 1 (2006): 80–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107>.

<sup>18</sup> I. G. Ayu Andani et al., 'Effects of Toll Road Construction on Local Road Projects in Indonesia', *Journal of Transport and Land Use* 12, no. 1 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.5198/jtlu.2019.1258>.

<sup>19</sup> Arditya Prakoso Putra, 'Impact of Toll Road Development on Modern Retail Growth In Indonesia', *Journal Research of Social Science, Economics, and Management* 2, no. 8 (2023): 1759–78.

<sup>20</sup> Rafika Amelia Istiqomah et al., 'A Comparasion Between Trans - Java Toll Road and Pantura Line on Distribution of Goods', *Advances in Transportation and Logistics Research* 2, no. 0 (2019): 1–8.

Despite these optimistic readings, much of the mainstream literature remains narrowly economistic, focusing on aggregate gains while marginalizing the distributive and political consequences. This idea is where David Harvey's concepts of *spatial fix* and *uneven geographical development* become analytically instructive. Harvey<sup>21</sup> theorizes how capitalist crises of overaccumulation are deferred by investing in spatial infrastructures that open up new circuits of capital flow. In this frame, toll roads are not neutral conduits of mobility, but strategic reconfigurations of space that facilitate capital accumulation, often via displacement and reterritorialization.

Building on this, recent critical empirical work reveals deeper structural entanglements. Hidayat et al.<sup>22</sup> examine the politicized rent-seeking embedded in infrastructure procurement, showing how regional elites exploit road projects as platforms for accumulation through regulatory capture. This situation is echoed in the adverse impacts experienced by MSMEs. For instance, the Bangkinang toll road reportedly led to a 50% decline in micro-enterprise sustainability.<sup>23</sup> In the historically vibrant *Pantura* corridor, rerouted traffic flows led to the collapse of up to 70% of batik and culinary MSMEs in Pekalongan, while commodity sellers in Brebes reported drastic revenue losses.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of toll road development, then, challenges Schumpeterian notions of "creative destruction."<sup>25</sup> Creative destruction in development contexts reveals how modernization projects systematically dismantle existing economic and social structures while producing profoundly uneven outcomes. Development interventions—such as infrastructure projects, industrial zones, and market liberalization—destroy local economies, traditional livelihoods, and community networks to make way for capital-intensive activities aligned with global markets. Unlike Schumpeter's framework, where innovation generates broadly shared gains, development-induced creative destruction concentrates benefits, primarily through the channels of infrastructure, investment, and growth. Accordingly, elites and corporations reduce the use of externalizing costs, which

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<sup>21</sup> David Harvey, 'Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"', *Geographische Revue: Zeitschrift Für Literatur Und Diskussion* 3, no. 2 (2001): 23–30, <https://d-nb.info/1217929630/34>; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (OUP Oxford, 2007); David Harvey, 'The Dialectics of Spacetime', in *Dialectics for the New Century*, ed. Bertell Ollman and Tony Smith (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230583818\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230583818_7); David Harvey, 'Roepke Lecture in Economic Geography—Crises, Geographic Disruptions and the Uneven Development of Political Responses', *Economic Geography* 87, no. 1 (2011): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-8287.2010.01105.x>.

<sup>22</sup> Syarif Hidayat et al., 'Unjust by Default: The Political Economy of Indonesia's Local Government Policy on Infrastructure Development', *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, SAGE Publications, 17 June 2024, 20578911241260442, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911241260442>.

<sup>23</sup> Rahmad Akbar et al., 'Analisis Dampak Pembangunan Infrastruktur Terhadap Pendapatan Rumah Makan Dan Usaha Oleh-Oleh (Studi Kasus Pembangunan Jalan Tol Bangkinang-Pekanbaru)', *Jurnal Teknik Industri Terintegrasi (JUTIN)* 7, no. 2 (2024): 2.

<sup>24</sup> Aini, 'Dampak Pembangunan Tol Trans-Jawa pada Perekonomian'; Thomas Nugroho, 'Disparitas Pembangunan Wilayah Pesisir Utara Setatan Jawa Barat ( Studi Kasus Kabupaten & Karawang Subang - Garut Ciamis)' (Master Thesis, Institut Pertanian Bogor, 2004), <http://repository.ipb.ac.id/handle/123456789/8999>.

<sup>25</sup> Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt, 'The Creative Destruction Approach to Growth Economics', *European Review* 31, no. 4 (2023): 312–25.

creates displacement, livelihood loss, and environmental degradation. As a result, it marginalized communities that often lack the resources to adapt to these changes. This asymmetry transforms creative destruction from an impersonal market mechanism into a political process where development serves as a spatial fix for capital accumulation. Nevertheless, this development strategy is widely used to reframe the systematic dismantling of existing economies as necessary modernization rather than accumulation by dispossession, which perpetuates inequality and exclusion.

Additionally, actors adopt digital marketing and relocation strategies for rest areas; the transitional costs, such as business closures, land loss, and market disruption, often precede any adaptive gains. Drawing on David Harvey's thesis of the *spatial fix* and insights from political ecology, toll road development can be seen not as neutral infrastructure, but as spatial reconfiguration projects that channel capital toward urban-industrial nodes while entrenching processes of dispossession and agrarian homogenization. Studies from Java and Sumatra demonstrate that toll corridors frequently lead to the commodification of farmland<sup>26</sup>, the erosion of farmers' assets<sup>27</sup>, psychological distress<sup>28</sup>, and even land-based conflicts involving indigenous communities.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, infrastructure-induced land-use change, particularly the conversion of agricultural zones, raises serious concerns for ecological sustainability and food sovereignty. A systematic review Makbul et al.<sup>30</sup> shows that toll-road expansion consistently displaces subsistence farming and undermines food security in Indonesia, echoing findings from earlier Trans-Java studies, where elevated land prices near toll gates prompted rice farmers to sell their productive land. Complicating this landscape is the widespread adoption of Public-Private Partnership (PPPs) models, while often promoted for their supposed efficiency. PPPs tend to privatize profits and socialize risk, precisely the neoliberal infrastructure mechanism that Harvey<sup>31</sup> critiques. Empirical analyses confirm that PPP structures typically shift financial and regulatory burdens onto the public sector via revenue guarantees, while allowing private firms to reap the returns.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Saptono Putro et al., 'The Impact of Ungaran Toll Gate Development on the Land Use Change in Its Surrounding', Atlantis Press, May 2019, 334–39, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icorsia-18.2019.80>.

<sup>27</sup> Virda Zikria et al., 'The Effect of Construction Banda Aceh - Sigli Toll Road on The Socio-Economic Conditions of Farmers in Aceh Besar Regency', *JSEP (Journal of Social and Agricultural Economics)* 17, no. 2 (2024): 2, <https://doi.org/10.19184/jsep.v17i2.44637>.

<sup>28</sup> Bkti Wahyu Utami et al., 'Examining the Impact of the Solo-Yogyakarta Toll Road Construction on Farmers' Assets and Psychological Well-Being', *AGRITEXTS: Journal of Agricultural Extension* 48, no. 1 (2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.20961/agritexts.v48i1.91698>.

<sup>29</sup> Frinsis Warmansyah et al., 'The Mapping of Potential Land Conflicts For The Padang-Pekanbaru Toll Road Based On Land Conflict Habits In West Sumatra', *Journal of Ecohumanism* 4, no. 1 (2025): 1, <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v4i1.6457>.

<sup>30</sup> Yogi Makbul et al., 'Infrastructure Development and Food Security in Indonesia: The Impact of the Trans-Java Toll Road on Rice Paddy Farmers' Desire to Sell Farmland', *Journal of Regional and City Planning* 30, no. 2 (2019): 140–56.

<sup>31</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

<sup>32</sup> K. S. Jomo and Anis Chowdhury, 'PPPs: Public Costs and Risks for Private Profits', *Development* 61, no. 1 (2018): 89–93, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-018-0188-z>.

Historically, *Pantura* functioned as a lifeline of interregional exchange since the colonial period.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the Trans-Java toll effectively marginalizes this legacy, reorienting economic flows away from historically embedded trading patterns. Despite this rupture, most studies fail to interrogate the socio-spatial dislocations that toll roads create, particularly for informal, small-scale, and localized economies.

This article, therefore, positions itself at the intersection of spatial political economy and empirical critique. By applying Harvey's framework of *spatial fix* and *uneven development*, augmented with insights from political ecology and institutional critique, it interrogates how toll infrastructure reorders spatial power, redistributes vulnerability, and generates new forms of exclusion. Far from being neutral engines of progress, toll roads emerge here as contested terrains where capital, mobility, and governance converge, often at the expense of smallholder resilience and spatial justice.

### III. INTERPRETING THE TOLL ROAD THROUGH THE LENS OF SPATIAL FIX

This study employs a critical-qualitative methodology grounded in the epistemology of critical realism.<sup>34</sup> Such a stance allows for the investigation of deeper causal mechanisms underlying observable patterns of infrastructural transformation and spatial inequality. Rather than accepting surface-level correlations, the research seeks to uncover the structural logics that shape economic displacement and reterritorialization along the *Pantura* corridor.

The analytical procedure involves a multi-step interpretive strategy. First, a corpus of secondary data, including policy documents, government reports, news articles, statistical releases, and prior academic studies, is compiled to trace key inflection points in the region's economic geography, both before and after the construction of the Trans-Java Toll Road. These sources enable the identification of patterns such as the closure of roadside businesses, land-use change, and shifts in microenterprise sustainability.

Following Fereday & Muir-Cochrane's<sup>35</sup> approach to thematic analysis, we code the material through both inductive and theory-driven lenses. Salient motifs, such as traffic displacement, rest-area economies, and spatial bypassing, are extracted and organized into thematic clusters. This hybrid approach allows the research to remain attentive to emergent narratives in the data while anchoring the analysis within Harvey's theoretical framework of *spatial fix* and *uneven geographical development*.

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<sup>33</sup> Hartatik, 'Dari Jalan Pesisir Menjadi Jalan Raya Pantura (Sejarah Jalan Raya Di Pantai Utara Jawa Tengah Abad XX)'; Kompas, 'Reorganize Economy on Java's Non-Toll Routes'; Kompas, *Ekspedisi Anjer-Panaroken*.

<sup>34</sup> Heeks and Wall, 'Critical Realism and ICT4D Research'.

<sup>35</sup> Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 'Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis'.



Given the reliance on pre-existing materials, the research adopts a secondary qualitative data analysis framework, as elaborated by Ruggiano and Perry.<sup>36</sup> This approach is particularly suited to contexts where new fieldwork may be constrained, yet rich insights can be drawn from systematically curated and critically interpreted documents. In line with this, special attention is paid to both the *presence* and *absence* of narratives, recognizing that silences around small-scale actors and informal economies often reflect broader neoliberal logics of visibility and valuation.

To address issues of data reliability and temporal inconsistencies, we employ a triangulation strategy<sup>37</sup> across multiple sources and time frames. For example, while official reports may lag behind actual developments, journalistic accounts may overemphasize short-term crises. The juxtaposition of state statistics with localized narratives and visual mappings enables a more layered understanding of toll-induced transformations.

Finally, the research is conducted from a reflexive and ethically grounded position. We recognize that methodological decisions, such as data selection, coding priorities, and theoretical framing, are interpretive acts that are shaped by the researcher's positionality. Embracing this reflexivity not only aligns with the ethical commitments of critical realism but also promotes a more just epistemology of infrastructure and development.

In sum, this methodology enables the study to move beyond descriptive mappings of toll road expansion. It seeks instead to uncover the structural and spatial logics through which platform capitalism reorganizes everyday life, particularly for vulnerable microeconomic actors negotiating uneven regimes of circulation and accumulation.

Global capitalism is fundamentally reliant on the efficient circulation of goods, services, and labour across geographical space. In this logic, time and money are tightly intertwined: the faster goods are moved, the lower the transportation cost, and consequently, the higher the profit margin.<sup>38</sup> Spatial efficiency, therefore, becomes a prerequisite for capital accumulation.

One of the primary strategies for achieving such efficiency is spatial concentration, wherein resources, production facilities, raw materials, and labour are geographically clustered. These agglomerations generate what David Harvey<sup>39</sup> terms "agglomeration economies", where businesses benefit from proximity-induced cost reductions. However, the benefits of spatial concentration have inherent limits. As markets become saturated and the costs of land, congestion, pollution, and labour

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<sup>36</sup> Nicole Ruggiano and Tam E Perry, 'Conducting Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data: Should We, Can We, and How?', *Qualitative Social Work* 18, no. 1 (2019): 81–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325017700701>.

<sup>37</sup> Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (Transaction Publishers, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Raju J Das, 'David Harvey's Theory of Uneven Geographical Development: A Marxist Critique', *Capital & Class* 41, no. 3 (2017): 511–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816816678584>.

<sup>39</sup> Harvey, 'Roepke Lecture in Economic Geography—Crises, Geographic Disruptions and the Uneven Development of Political Responses'.

increase, driven by the density of the workforce, profitability begins to decline.<sup>40</sup> It is at this threshold that capital begins to seek new spatial fixes.

David Harvey<sup>41</sup> introduced the concept of the spatial fix to explain how capitalism circumvents crises of overaccumulation by spatial expansion. Capital that is "locked in" fixed infrastructure (e.g., roads, ports, industrial zones) must be geographically redeployed to new regions via the construction of new economic spaces. These include toll roads, special economic zones, and logistics corridors. However, this process is inherently contradictory; it requires the "fixity" of infrastructure to facilitate the "mobility" of capital, creating new vulnerabilities when those spatial investments no longer yield expected returns.

Harvey's<sup>42</sup> idea of "accumulation by dispossession" further elucidates how capital expansion is often predicated not on value creation, but on the expropriation and commodification of previously public or communal resources. This critique encompasses land privatization, the displacement of farming communities, and the commercialization of public goods, including transportation, water, healthcare, and education. In the Indonesian context, these processes are evident in the development of the Trans-Java Toll Road, a megaproject funded by a consortium of state-owned enterprises and private (including foreign) investors.<sup>43</sup>

This logic of spatial fix is frequently accompanied by "uneven geographical development"<sup>44</sup>, in which infrastructure investment disproportionately benefits certain regions while marginalizing others. A case in point is the rapid urban expansion in northern West Java, as documented by Gandharum.<sup>45</sup> Using satellite data and intensity analysis, their study reveals that between 2013 and 2020, annual agricultural land loss in the Bekasi-Karawang-Cirebon corridor surged to approximately 1,850 hectares per year, more than double the rate of the previous decade. Simultaneously, newly developed built-up areas increased by over 2,030 hectares annually, indicating a systematic conversion of agrarian landscapes into urban and commercial zones. These findings reflect the spatial logic of capital, which involves abandoning unprofitable circuits, such as traditional agricultural economies, in favor of urban-industrial real estate speculation.

Moreover, the Trans-Java Toll Road epitomizes the neoliberalization of infrastructure, where public facilities are reconfigured into market instruments. As Vanoutrive<sup>46</sup> argued, roads in the neoliberal era are not merely transit spaces but are

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<sup>40</sup> Das, 'David Harvey's Theory of Uneven Geographical Development'; David Harvey, 'The Dialectics of Spacetime', in *Dialectics for the New Century*, ed. Bertell Ollman and Tony Smith (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230583818\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230583818_7).

<sup>41</sup> Harvey, 'Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"'; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

<sup>42</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Harvey, 'The Dialectics of Spacetime'.

<sup>43</sup> Hidayat et al., 'Unjust by Default'.

<sup>44</sup> Harvey, 'Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"'.  
<sup>45</sup> Gandharum et al., 'Monitoring Urban Expansion and Loss of Agriculture on the North Coast of West Java Province, Indonesia, Using Google Earth Engine and Intensity Analysis'.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Vanoutrive, 'Don't Think of Them as Roads. Think of Them as Road Transport Markets: Congestion Pricing as a Neoliberal Political Project', *Progress in Planning*, Don't think of them as roads. Think of them as road transport markets. Congestion pricing as a neoliberal political project, vol. 117 (October 2017): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.progress.2016.04.001>.

commodified via toll systems, congestion pricing, and public-private partnerships (PPPs). These mechanisms shift the financial burden from the state to citizens while enabling private actors to profit from what were once public goods. In this vein, Jomo and Chowdhury<sup>47</sup> contend that PPPs often mask the transfer of public risk into private gain, a description aptly applied to toll road consortia in Indonesia.

Putra<sup>48</sup> adds that the spatial reconfiguration induced by toll roads is also reflected in the transformation of the retail economy. Based on a difference-in-differences analysis from 2006 to 2018, villages located near toll roads experienced an increase of 0.53 modern retail outlets per village, compared to those not located near toll corridors. Crucially, there was no significant increase in traditional retail outlets, highlighting a shift in spatial advantage toward capital-intensive businesses. This development exemplifies how toll roads recalibrate access to markets, favouring actors with greater mobility, scale, and financial resilience.

This transformation is not merely physical or logistical; it is profoundly ideological. As Hiariej<sup>49</sup> and Putra<sup>50</sup> argue, toll roads embody a political project that normalizes inequality. They are portrayed as symbols of efficiency and progress; yet, obscure the spatial exclusion of micro-enterprises and agrarian communities who lack the means to access or adapt to this new geography.

In sum, the Trans-Java Toll Road exemplifies a neoliberal spatial fix in contemporary Indonesia. It operates as a strategic response to capital's need for movement and reproduction but does so by reconfiguring and displacing older economic spaces, most notably the once-vibrant *Pantura* corridor. By diverting flows of goods, people, and services from traditional networks to newly engineered corridors of capital, the project entrenches and deepens existing spatial inequalities.

The North Coast of Java highway, also known as *Jalur Pantura*, holds a legendary status in the Indonesian national psyche. Not only does it function as a vital transportation artery, but it also represents a socio-cultural corridor rich in historical significance. Its origins date back to the era of Islamic Mataram and reached new importance under Dutch colonial rule when Governor-General Herman Willem Daendels (1808–1811) commissioned the construction of the "Great Post Road" (*Jalan Raya Pos*) to strengthen defence and streamline administration. This route facilitated both military logistics and the transport of agricultural commodities, significantly accelerating communication and trade flows.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jomo and Chowdhury, 'PPPs'.

<sup>48</sup> Putra, 'Teori Ketimpangan Pembangunan Geografis David Harvey Dalam Tinjauan Filsafat Ekonomi'.

<sup>49</sup> Eric Hiariej, 'Globalisasi Budaya: Homogenitas Atau Hibridasi?', in *Globalisasi, Kapitalisme Dan Perlawanan* (Institute of International Studies, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Putra, 'Teori Ketimpangan Pembangunan Geografis David Harvey Dalam Tinjauan Filsafat Ekonomi'.

<sup>51</sup> Kompas, *Ekspedisi Anjer-Panaroean*.

Since then, *Jalur Pantura* has evolved into an urbanized economic corridor, particularly flourishing after the 1980s with the rise of motorized transportation and the expansion of regional industry. It supplanted rivers as the central infrastructural backbone and drove a shift in Javanese urban morphology toward road-oriented development.<sup>52</sup> Coastal ports along the route (e.g., Cirebon, Tegal, Semarang, and Surabaya) served as economic hubs, integrating hinterlands into national and global trade flows.<sup>53</sup>

The strategic positioning of *Jalur Pantura* has made it the backbone of Java's north coast economy, as reflected in high vehicle flows, ranging from 20,000 to 70,000 vehicles per day.<sup>54</sup> This heavy usage helped generate dense commercial clustering along the route, from MSMEs and local markets to major logistics hubs. However, the absence of long-term infrastructural renewal and regional planning has made the corridor increasingly vulnerable to spatial stress and policy displacement.

The construction of the Trans-Java Toll Road, which has been operational since 2018 and spans more than 1,100 kilometers, with 933 km officially declared operational by 2022<sup>55</sup>, represents a decisive rupture in this historical trajectory. Although designed to address traffic congestion and support national logistics, the toll road has drawn economic activity away from traditional corridors. The spatial and economic realignment has had far-reaching implications. According to a 2023 report by Gerindra Party, an estimated 70% of restaurants along *Pantura* have closed, 30% of *warung* (small food stalls) have experienced income reductions, and 70% of fuel stations are operating at a loss, prompting widespread layoffs and financial insecurity in surrounding communities.<sup>56</sup>

These closures reflect more than a simple decline in commercial performance; they signal an underlying process of economic displacement, whereby access to infrastructure becomes a determinant of inclusion or exclusion within new circuits of capital. What emerges is not just a shift in logistics routes, but the degeneration of socioeconomic ecosystems that had taken decades to form.

This transition is visible even in agricultural-industrial linkages. A case study Ikhwan and Nugroho<sup>57</sup> in Brebes, Central Java, a region historically known for its roadside salted egg industry, recorded a significant restructuring of marketing channels following the construction of toll roads. The farmer's share in one marketing channel increased from 64.24% to 70.66%, reflecting improved margins but also suggesting the

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<sup>52</sup> Hartatik, 'Dari Jalan Pesisir Menjadi Jalan Raya Pantura (Sejarah Jalan Raya Di Pantai Utara Jawa Tengah Abad XX)'.

<sup>53</sup> Rizka Oktaviana, 'Pelabuhan Di Pesisir Utara Jawa Tengah Rawan Tenggelam', News, Departemen Teknik Transportasi Laut, 16 April 2020, <https://www.its.ac.id/seatrans/id/pelabuhan-di-pesisir-utara-jawa-tengah/>.

<sup>54</sup> Hikam, 'Menelusuri Sisa Kejayaan Jalur Pantura yang Habis "Dilalap" Trans Jawa'.

<sup>55</sup> Muawwan Daelami and Tri Murti, 'PUPR Pushes for Accelerated Completion of Trans Java Toll Road', PwC, 2 November 2022, <https://www.pwc.com/id/en/media-centre/infrastructure-news/november-2022/pupr-pushes-for-accelerated-completion-of-trans-java-toll-road.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Anam, 'Kematian Ekonomi Jalur Pantura'.

<sup>57</sup> Syariefful Ikhwan and Bangun Satrio Nugroho, 'Identifikasi Dampak Pembangunan Jalan Tol Pejagalan-Brebes Timur Terhadap Pemasaran Telur Asin Di Jalan Pantura Brebes (Studi Kasus Umkm Telur Asin Kabupaten Brebes)', *Probisnis* 12, no. 1 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.35671/probisnis.v12i1.817>.

weakening role of traditional intermediaries (often small local traders), many of whom have been cut off from newer, centralized logistics systems. A more recent analysis by Universitas Diponegoro reinforced this observation, reporting a decline of 64.32% in sales turnover, 61% in profit margin, and an over 14% reduction in working hours.<sup>58</sup>

According to the total PDRB (*Produk Domestik Regional Bruto*) of the district, the total remains relatively stable; however, there is stagnation or even contraction in sectors such as transportation and warehousing after 2019, which have historically depended on road-based distribution and roadside commerce. Between 2019 and 2023, the growth of the transportation and warehousing sector decelerated significantly, with year-on-year growth falling below 1% in several periods, compared to over 5% in pre-toll years. Meanwhile, the trade sector, particularly retail, also showed signs of plateauing, indicating a disruption to traditional supply chains and consumer access. This reality suggests that the diversion of logistical flows and passenger traffic due to toll-road expansion has structurally undercut the viability of *Pantura*-based economic actors, particularly those lacking the capacity to reorient toward toll-centered circuits. These patterns underscore a growing decoupling between infrastructure investment and inclusive regional growth.

The *Jalur Pantura* also suffers from significant infrastructural degradation. Fauziyah and Rusiana<sup>59</sup> Reports indicate that overloaded trucks (ODOL) have caused over Rp 20 trillion in annual road damage, exacerbating logistical disruptions and threatening the sustainability of local economies. These road conditions, alongside chronic congestion, discourage long-distance travel and impact industries that rely on tourism and retail services.

The economic pull of toll-road exit zones further illustrates the spatial divergence in development outcomes. According to Marpaung et al.<sup>60</sup> urban expansion and investment are now predominantly concentrated near toll exits, while towns bypassed by the new toll infrastructure experience declining land values, outmigration, and weakened commercial activity. Sasra<sup>61</sup> characterizes many former *Pantura* economic centers as "ghost towns," where once-thriving retail strips and logistics hubs now sit deserted and underutilized.

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<sup>58</sup> Nurul Aeni Rahmahyanti and Achma Hendra Setiawan, 'Analisis Perbedaan Perkembangan Usaha Telur Asin di Sepanjang Jalan Pantai Utara Kabupaten Brebes Sebelum dan Sesudah Adanya Jalan Tol Pejagan-Semarang', *Diponegoro Journal of Economics* 10, no. 2 (2021): 2, <https://ejournal3.undip.ac.id/index.php/jme/article/view/31598>.

<sup>59</sup> Titis Anis Fauziyah and Dita Angga Rusiana, 'Truk ODOL Bikin Jalur Pantura Rusak, Kerugiannya Capai Rp 20 Triliun Per Tahun', Online News, KOMPAS.com, 24 November 2023, <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2023/11/25/050700478/truk-odol-bikin-jalur-pantura-rusak-kerugiannya-capai-rp-20-triliun-per>.

<sup>60</sup> Grace Natalia Marpaung et al., 'Socioeconomy Conditions After The Development of Toll Roads in Salatiga', *Economics Development Analysis Journal* 10, no. 1 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.15294/edaj.v10i1.40966>.

<sup>61</sup> Dikhy Sasra, 'Pantura, Hidup Segan Mati Pun Enggan', Online News, detikfinance, 17 July 2022, <https://finance.detik.com/foto-bisnis/d-6181910/pantura-hidup-segan-mati-pun-enggan>.

However, the displacement does not unfold uniformly. Fatimah<sup>62</sup>, using the Theil Entropy Index, shows that while regional inequality across Java's north coast is relatively low overall (average index: 0.0261), certain districts, such as Cilegon, experience intense spatial-economic polarization (index: 0.4884), driven by heavy industrial concentration and foreign capital inflows. In contrast, Pasuruan, with its more diversified economy and active MSME and tourism sectors, records a significantly lower index (0.0004), suggesting stronger resilience to economic shocks associated with spatial reordering.

This reality reveals a broader structural realignment of Java's economic geography, where older, historically integrated spaces, such as the *Pantura* corridor, are increasingly marginalized in favour of new, infrastructure-centered growth poles. This change is a vivid expression of what David Harvey conceptualizes as uneven geographical development, where spatial fixes for capital accumulation simultaneously produce exclusion and redundancy in once-vital areas.

The trends outlined above can be further illustrated through a synthesis of empirical findings drawn from diverse scholarly and journalistic sources. The following table compiles key indicators of economic displacement and route degeneration along the *Pantura* corridor. These indicators encompass income losses, infrastructural strain, historical shifts, and urban-economic divergence resulting from the construction and operationalization of the Trans-Java Toll Road. By presenting both qualitative observations and quantitative data, this table highlights the multi-scalar impact of infrastructure-led development on local livelihoods and territorial organization.

Table: Economic Displacement and Route Degeneration Along the <i>Pantura</i> Corridor					
No	Source	Location or Scope	Indicator	Value or Description	Year
1	Anam (2023)	<i>Pantura</i>	Restaurant closures	± 70 % of restaurants closed	2023
2	Anam (2023)	<i>Pantura</i>	Warung/stalls' income drop	± 30 % income decline	2023
3	Anam (2023)	<i>Pantura</i>	Fuel station losses	± 70 % experiencing losses	2023
4	Hikam (2022)	North vs South Coast	Vehicle density	20,000–70,000 vehicles/day ( <i>Pantura</i> )	2022
5	Kompas (2023)	<i>Pantura</i>	Road damage cost (ODOL trucks)	Rp 20 trillion/year	2023
6	Ikhwan & Nugroho (2019)	Brebes, Central Java	Increase in farmers' share (telur asin)	From 64.24 % to 70.66 %	2019

<sup>62</sup> Atika Fatimah, 'Analisis Disparitas Ekonomi Daerah Pesisir Pulau Jawa', *Bina Ekonomi* 24, no. 1 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.26593/be.v24i1.3497.61-70>.

7	Fatimah (2020)	Java North Coast	Theil Entropy Index (average)	0.0261	2016
8	Fatimah (2020)	Cilegon District	Theil Index (highest)	0.4884	2016
9	Fatimah (2020)	Pasuruan District	Theil Index (lowest)	0.0004	2016
10	Hartatik (2016)	<i>Pantura</i>	Historical transition	From river-based to road-based spine	2016
11	<sup>63</sup>	<i>Pantura</i>	Development bottleneck	Road capacity limit reached	2017
12	Marpaung et al. (2021)	Toll exit areas	Urban shift	Toll areas thrive, <i>Pantura</i> declines	2021
13	<sup>64</sup>	Brebes Regency	PDRB growth rate (constant 2010)	5.61 % (2022), 3.74 % (2023)	2022–2023
14	<sup>65</sup>	Trans-Java Toll Road network	Toll length operational	1,056 km of 1,167 km planned	2022

In sum, the economic displacement caused by the Trans-Java Toll Road does not merely reflect a byproduct of infrastructural modernization; rather, it exemplifies a more profound geoeconomic restructuring, one that dislocates entrenched livelihoods, hollows out traditional economic corridors, and privileges newly integrated, capital-intensive zones over historically embedded economic ecologies.

These findings reinforce the argument that infrastructural megaprojects, while discursively framed as engines of national connectivity and growth, often exacerbate pre-existing spatial asymmetries. The decline of *Pantura* is not simply an unintended consequence but a structurally produced outcome of selective development logic. Addressing these outcomes will require not only inclusive spatial planning but also proactive redistributive strategies. These restorative economic policies acknowledge and repair the developmental exclusions of bypassed infrastructures and overlooked communities.

<sup>63</sup> Hediyanto W. Husaini and Triono Junoasmono, 'Peran Infrastruktur Jalan Pantura Jawa Dalam Rangka Mendukung Peningkatan Ekonomi Nasional', *Jurnal HPJI (Himpunan Pengembangan Jalan Indonesia)* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.26593/jh.v3i1.2435.%2525p>.

<sup>64</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Brebes, *Produk Domestik Regional Bruto Kabupaten Brebes Menurut Lapangan Usaha 2020–2024*, Government Document (2025), <https://brebeskab.bps.go.id/id/publication/2025/04/11/1f837390bc2fd01832a2e9af/produk-domestik-regional-bruto-kabupaten-brebes-menurut-lapangan-usaha-2020-2024.html?utm>.

<sup>65</sup> Daelami and Tri Murti, 'PUPR Pushes for Accelerated Completion of Trans Java Toll Road'.

#### IV. THEY WHO LEAVE BEHIND: SMALL BUSINESS VULNERABILITY AND REST-AREA SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

The construction of toll roads, including the Trans-Java Toll Road, is often justified by the promise of increased transportation efficiency and shorter travel times. Studies, such as those by Ahmad<sup>66</sup> affirm this objective by demonstrating that regions and cities situated along the toll road have experienced a measurable positive impact on their economic growth. However, this growth is not uniform and is contingent on multiple variables beyond infrastructure alone. Marpaung et al.<sup>67</sup>, for example, emphasize that factors such as the Human Development Index (HDI) and the share of the agricultural sector remain pivotal in influencing local-level economic performance.

While some areas have experienced benefits, others, particularly those bypassed by the toll, have encountered substantial economic disruptions. One such example is the salted egg industry in Brebes, Central Java. Ikhwan and Nugroho<sup>68</sup> observed a notable increase in the farmers' share of profits (from 64.24% to 70.66%) following toll road construction. However, this increase also reflects a broader reconfiguration of supply chains that has disadvantaged small-scale distributors and market intermediaries. In essence, while producers may benefit, local traders and small vendors along the traditional routes are increasingly marginalized.

This spatial shift epitomizes David Harvey's<sup>69</sup> notion of the "spatial fix", a mechanism by which capital resolves its crisis tendencies through geographical restructuring. Toll road development acts as a form of dispossession, redistributing accessibility and economic opportunity away from older routes, such as the *Pantura*, and concentrating them along new corridors. While the overall infrastructure may promote aggregate growth, it does so through processes that often displace small actors.

Empirical evidence from West Java provides poignant illustrations of this dynamic. In Subang, Srikandi Restaurant, once a prominent culinary stop for travellers, closed down after the opening of the Purwakarta–Cirebon toll road.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the historic Tahu Bungkeng restaurant in Sumedang experienced a steep decline in customers as the traffic flow was redirected. Along the same stretch, the now-abandoned Rosalia Restaurant and the Nella Karaoke building stand as silent witnesses to the dislocation of economic activity from the *Pantura* to the toll corridor.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ahmad, 'The Impact of Trans Java Toll Road Construction on Economic Growth in Central Java'.

<sup>67</sup> Marpaung et al., 'Socioeconomy Conditions After The Development of Toll Roads in Salatiga'.

<sup>68</sup> Ikhwan and Nugroho, 'Identifikasi Dampak Pembangunan Jalan Tol Pejagalan-Brebes Timur Terhadap Pemasaran Telur Asin Di Jalan Pantura Brebes (Studi Kasus Umkm Telur Asin Kabupaten Brebes)'.

<sup>69</sup> Harvey, 'The Dialectics of Spacetime'.

<sup>70</sup> Kompas, 'Reorganize Economy on Java's Non-Toll Routes'.

<sup>71</sup> Anam, 'Kematian Ekonomi Jalur Pantura'; Hikam, 'Menelusuri Sisa Kejayaan Jalur Pantura yang Habis "Dilahap" Trans Jawa'.



The effects also extend to the retail sector. Batik vendors at the Setono wholesale market in Pekalongan reported a 50–70% drop in income due to reduced traffic and poor access to toll roads.<sup>72</sup> Without a convenient toll exit, travelers bypass the city in favor of better-connected towns such as Pemalang and Batang. In Brebes, the closures of major salted egg businesses, such as Mutiara and Ibu Lina<sup>73</sup> further signal the severity of the longstanding placement of enterprises along the older route.

More broadly, this economic vulnerability stems from a confluence of factors. Rasmewahni and Syafrizal<sup>74</sup> found that toll development in Serdang Bedagai led to layoffs and the closure of MSME shops, particularly in the souvenir trade. Similarly, Rahayu and Kipuw<sup>75</sup>, in their study of MSMEs near the Soroja toll road, that while 77.27% of medium-sized enterprises experienced profit growth, only 36.36% of small-sized enterprises saw similar benefits. The remaining 63.64% reported either no change or outright losses, underlining a sharp structural gap in business resilience.

Rahmadiane and Mahmudah<sup>76</sup> through their analysis of 271 MSMEs across Indonesia, they identified critical internal limitations: weak marketing capacity, poor strategic planning, insufficient technological adoption, and limited access to capital. These constraints, exacerbated by the sudden redirection of consumer flows, have rendered small enterprises especially vulnerable to collapse. Even government interventions, such as support for e-commerce platforms and digital training,<sup>77</sup> have struggled to reach the most marginalized businesses, particularly those unable to afford the steep rental fees for rest areas, which reportedly reach IDR 50 million per year.

Despite some adaptive strategies emerging, such as local product diversification<sup>78</sup>, improved hygiene standards for culinary micro and small enterprises<sup>79</sup>, or reorientation toward tourism-based branding<sup>80</sup>, the underlying asymmetry remains. Without targeted policy reforms, such as rent subsidies, traffic redistribution mechanisms, or MSME-specific zoning for rest areas, these adaptation efforts are unlikely to achieve systemic resilience.

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<sup>72</sup> Fauziyah and Rusiana, 'Truk ODOL Bikin Jalur Pantura Rusak, Kerugiannya Capai Rp 20 Triliun Per Tahun'.

<sup>73</sup> Ikhwani and Nugroho, 'Identifikasi Dampak Pembangunan Jalan Tol Pejagalan-Brebes Timur Terhadap Pemasaran Telur Asin Di Jalan Pantura Brebes (Studi Kasus Umkm Telur Asin Kabupaten Brebes)'.

<sup>74</sup> Rasmewahni and Syafrizal, 'Integration Strategy for Infrastructure Development in MSME Product Marketing Systems in Serdang Bedagai Regency North Sumatra'.

<sup>75</sup> Rahayu and Kipuw, 'The Correlation between Toll Road Development and the Improvement of Local Economy (Case Study)'.

<sup>76</sup> Ghea Dwi Rahmadiane and Nurul Mahmudah, 'The Analysis of Marketing, Strategy Planning, Enterprise Orientation, Technology, and Capital on Indonesian MSMEs Performance', Atlantis Press, 11 November 2022, 8–17, [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-09-1\\_3](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-09-1_3).

<sup>77</sup> Putra, 'Impact of Toll Road Development on Modern Retail Growth In Indonesia', 2023.

<sup>78</sup> Zikria et al., 'The Effect of Construction Banda Aceh - Sigli Toll Road on The Socio-Economic Conditions of Farmers in Aceh Besar Regency'.

<sup>79</sup> Akbar et al., 'Analisis Dampak Pembangunan Infrastruktur Terhadap Pendapatan Rumah Makan Dan Usaha Oleh-Oleh (Studi Kasus Pembangunan Jalan Tol Bangkinang-Pekanbaru)'.

<sup>80</sup> Utami et al., 'Examining the Impact of the Solo-Yogyakarta Toll Road Construction on Farmers' Assets and Psychological Well-Being'.

The Trans-Java Toll Road not only signifies a physical restructuring of movement and logistics but also reflects a deeper socioeconomic reordering. The "spatial fix" it embodies has contributed to the decline of traditional commercial arteries, such as the *Pantura*, pushing small businesses into precarious conditions. Warmansyah et al.<sup>81</sup> argue that future infrastructure planning must integrate inclusive design principles that prioritize the survival of small-scale economies alongside national economic goals. Only through such holistic strategies can the full spectrum of actors, large and small, benefit equitably from Indonesia's infrastructure modernization.

In addition to the Trans-Java toll road, it exemplifies the synthesis of creative destruction and spatial fix as Indonesia's reformasi state deploys infrastructure megaprojects to resolve capital accumulation crises through deliberate geographic restructuring. Jokowi's significant contribution to this situation is through an infrastructure-led development strategy.<sup>82</sup> This project is claimed as a National Strategic Project. At the same time, in the theoretical context, the toll road represents a massive spatial fix that absorbs overaccumulated domestic capital, and state-owned enterprises play a crucial role in making the toll road a reality.

The mega project has incorporated Indonesia into the Chinese Belt and Road investment. This infrastructure investment literally fixes capital in concrete across Java's landscape, restructuring the island's economic geography to facilitate accelerated commodity circulation, reduced logistics costs, and just-in-time production systems. However, this spatial reorganization operates through systematic creative destruction along the northern coast (*Pantura*) route, where elevated express lanes eliminate the historic spatial economy that sustained thousands of *warung* (roadside eateries), automotive workshops, *losmen* (budget accommodations), artisan retailers, and informal services, which depended on intercity traffic.

The toll road does not simply offer alternatives; it actively destroys friction-dependent economies by removing traffic entirely from ground-level routes, transforming vibrant commercial corridors into bypassed ghost towns. What Harvey calls "time-space compression" is a concept that, within it, the reduction of Jakarta-Surabaya travel time from 12-15 hours to 7-8 hours benefits logistics companies, manufacturing firms, and e-commerce platforms that require velocity. In contrast, it catastrophically impacts communities whose reproduction depended on the spatial practices that the toll road eliminates. *Warung* owners face worthless roadside properties, mechanics lose trucking clients, fuel stations see revenue collapse, and *batik* artisans lose tourist traffic—these are not inefficient businesses being outcompeted, but spatially embedded livelihoods actively destroyed because their geographic positions, optimized for pre-toll circulation patterns, become obsolete under new configurations that value speed over stopping.

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<sup>81</sup> Warmansyah et al., 'The Mapping of Potential Land Conflicts For The Padang-Pekanbaru Toll Road Based On Land Conflict Habits In West Sumatra'.

<sup>82</sup> David Ray and Lili Yan Ing, 'Addressing Indonesia's Infrastructure Deficit', *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 52, no. 1 (2016): 1-25.

The spatial fix operates through precise mechanisms that concentrate benefits among mobile capital while externalizing costs onto spatially fixed populations, revealing the toll road as fundamentally a class project disguised as infrastructure modernization. Winners cluster in capital-intensive sectors, including logistics conglomerates that establish regional hubs at toll exits, manufacturing corporations that restructure their supply chains around toll-connected industrial parks, e-commerce platforms that promise faster delivery, real estate developers who capture land value near new infrastructure, and construction firms that secure government contracts. These actors possess capital mobility—they relocate operations, access financing, and optimize spatial strategies in response to new infrastructure. Losers concentrate among immobile populations: *Pantura* business owners whose assets lose value due to traffic diversion, informal workers whose livelihoods depend on ground-level traffic density, agricultural communities whose lands are appropriated at below-market compensation for toll construction and adjacent industrial estates, and MSMEs lacking the capital to adapt.

The state actively produces this uneven geography through legal frameworks, for instance, the Land Acquisition Law and the omnibus Job Creation Law that streamlines appropriation while reducing compensation and eliminating community consent. The government projected that financial mechanisms where state banks and pension funds socialize investment risk, while toll concessions privatize returns, and coercive apparatuses deploy military and police for forced evictions. However, this coordination between state power and capital interests reveals how the toll road serves accumulation imperatives rather than public transportation needs, pricing out most Indonesians while subsidizing commercial freight. This data illustrates that infrastructure routes prioritize port-to-factory-to-export connectivity over community accessibility, replicating colonial spatial hierarchies where infrastructure served extraction rather than equitable development.

The discourse of creative destruction operates ideologically to naturalize this violence and continuously represses marginal groups by framing geographic restructuring as inevitable modernization rather than political choice serving specific class interests. Government rhetoric celebrates connectivity and efficiency while rendering invisible the thousands of destroyed livelihoods. The cases of *Pantura* business owners are dismissed as resisting progress when they protest traffic loss, rather than being recognized for bearing disproportionate costs that benefit distant elites.

Although the state offers no compensation for lost business value, inadequate retraining, and no alternative economic strategies for bypassed towns, their destruction is naturalized as a market adjustment requiring no remediation. This ideological framework proves particularly effective because it captures even affected communities, many of whom internalize development discourse and demand inclusion in modernization, rather than challenging the spatial fix itself, despite these promised opportunities materializing far less than claimed.

Ultimately, marginal groups face continuous repression because the toll road's success as a spatial fix depends precisely on destroying their spatial practices: the *Pantura warung* owner, displaced farmer, bypassed town, and informal worker all occupy positions incompatible with toll road logic, valuing frictionless circulation over embedded communities. This practice is an ongoing dispossession that resulted from policy failure, yet it is a constitutive requirement. Infrastructure-led development requires new spaces to absorb capital and new populations to displace, making creative destruction through spatial fixes not a transitional friction, but the operational logic of Indonesia's subordinate position in global capitalism. Subsequently, it reproduces itself, where democratization and decentralization have not eliminated the violence of authoritarian development, but rather intensified and distributed it across various scales. Particularly with infrastructure megaprojects serving as primary mechanisms through which reformasi Indonesia converts geography into an opportunity for accumulation and communities into expendable obstacles.

## V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study has examined the socio-spatial consequences of the Trans-Java Toll Road through a critical-qualitative lens grounded in David Harvey's theory of *spatial fix* and *uneven geographical development*. By tracing patterns of infrastructural transformation, economic displacement, and spatial bypassing along the *Pantura* corridor, based on thematic analysis of secondary data sources, this research challenges dominant narratives that frame infrastructure as a universally beneficial driver of development.

While the toll road has undeniably enhanced intercity mobility and stimulated investment in certain urbanized enclaves, it has also produced a spatial reordering that systematically marginalizes micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) embedded in the traditional economy of the *Pantura*. Declining traffic volumes, the collapse of roadside businesses, and the rise of capital-intensive retail in toll-access zones illustrate how infrastructure, under neoliberal imperatives, often operates as a mechanism of selective accumulation and territorial exclusion.

Rather than viewing these outcomes as unintended consequences, this study argues that they are symptomatic of deeper capitalist logics of commodification, dispossession, and scalar advantage, where development favors actors with capital, scale, and mobility while rendering others increasingly invisible. The absence of compensatory frameworks for local economic actors underscores the structural injustices embedded in infrastructure-led development strategies.

The policy implications are urgent. Infrastructure is not spatially neutral. Toll roads, while enabling new economic flows, simultaneously redirect capital, visibility, and viability away from existing socioeconomic landscapes. To address these structural imbalances, policymakers must move beyond mitigation toward transformation. This situation includes: (1) Inclusive spatial planning that systematically assesses toll-induced dislocations and integrates small-scale economic geographies into national

mobility networks; (2) Participatory governance frameworks that involve MSMEs and affected communities in the planning and design stages of megaprojects; (3) Redistributive support mechanisms, including rent stabilization near toll exits, incentives for digital and logistic adaptation, and regulatory protections against displacement and monopolization in toll-linked retail zones.

In conclusion, the Trans-Java Toll Road exemplifies the contradictions of neoliberal infrastructure: while it may promise growth and efficiency, it also intensifies inequality and territorial fragmentation. Without intentional redistributive policies and spatial justice frameworks, such projects risk entrenching rather than alleviating uneven development. As Indonesia continues to pursue large-scale infrastructure expansion, future planning must be grounded not only in technical rationality but also in social equity, economic inclusion, and long-term sustainability.

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