

FROM *DUSUN* TO CITY: THE TOPONYM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF LANDSCAPE OF SUNGAI PENUH, HIGHLAND JAMBI

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mendiskusikan sejarah toponim Sungai Penuh, kota di Dataran Tinggi Provinsi Jambi. Kota ini secara resmi berdiri pada tahun 2008 tetapi toponimnya telah digunakan lebih dari 300 tahun. Penggunaan toponim ini berhubungan erat dengan komunitasnya dan mampu menggambarkan perubahan lanskapnya. Penelitian ini menerapkan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode sejarah. Penelitian ini dimulai dari pengumpulan data melalui studi pustaka dan survei. Data primer dalam penelitian ini berupa manuskrip kuno, arsip colonial, dan data arkeologi. Perspektif lanskap arkeologi diterapkan untuk menginterpretasikan perubahan lanskap dan relasinya dengan penggunaan toponim. Hasilnya, toponim Sungai Penuh diinspirasi dari sumber daya alam. Sistem tradisional masyarakat mendukung pelestarian toponim ini meskipun memiliki perbedaan makna untuk setiap konteksnya. Penggunaan toponim ini menggambarkan perubahan lanskap dari dusun tradisional masyarakat Kerinci menjadi kota Kolonial modern.

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Sungai Penuh; Landscape;
Toponym; Kerinci Society

This article discusses the history of the toponym of Sungai Penuh, a city in the highland of Jambi Province. It was legitimized in 2008, but its toponym has been used for more than 300 years. The use of this toponym is related to its community and could describe the change in its landscape. This research employs a qualitative approach and historical methodology. This research started collecting data through a literature review and a survey. Primary data in this research are manuscripts, colonial archives, and archaeological data. An archaeological landscape perspective is employed to interpret the change of landscape and its relation to the use of toponym. As a result, the toponym of Sungai Penuh was inspired by the natural resource. The traditional system has supported the preservation of this toponym, although it has different meanings for each context. The use of this toponym described the change of landscape from the traditional dusun of Kerinci society to the modern colonial city.



1. Introduction

Sungai Penuh is the name of a city in Jambi Province. This region spans an area of approximately 36,492 hectares, located in the western part of Jambi Province, approximately 421 km away (Julianti & Suhermin, 2026, pp. 3–4). Geographically, this region is situated in the Kerinci Valley, bounded by the Barisan Hills to the west and numerous rivers that flow throughout the valley (Hasibuan, 2010). Paddy fields and settlements are set in the valley following the river's flow. Administratively, Sungai Penuh City was established in 2008, following its separation from Kerinci Regency. Nowadays, this city consists of 8 districts and 65 villages (see **Figure 1**). It had a population of approximately 100,847 people in 2024 (Julianti & Suhermin, 2026, p. 3).

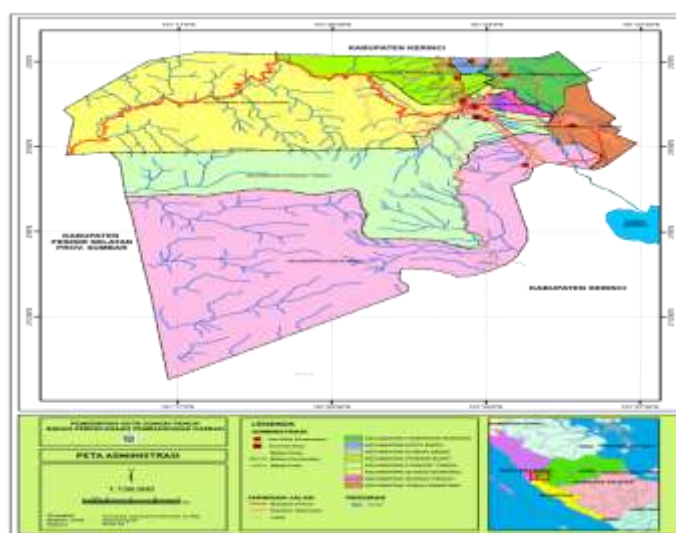


Figure 1. Administrative map of Sungai Penuh City

Source: Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah Kota Sungai Penuh

This region is settled by the majority of Kerinci people, one of the original tribes of Jambi (Sunliensyar, 2020). This tribe is rooted in the Austronesian people who migrated to the area from 3500 years ago (Setyaningsih et al., 2019; Tjoa-Bonatz, 2012). There are many archaeological sites in Jambi Highland, including Sungai Penuh now, that prove the existence of Austronesians in the Neolithic period (Bonatz, 2009, 2012; Bonatz et al., 2006; Fauzi, 2017; Tjoa-Bonatz, 2012). Culturally, the population of the Kerinci people is concentrated on the Jambi Highland, mainly in Sungai Penuh City, Kerinci Regency, Merangin City, and around it. They also migrated to the Semenanjung Tanah Melayu, Jambi, Deli, and Bengkulu for trading and working during the colonial period (Zainuddin & Latief, 2021).

The toponym (place naming) Sungai Penuh was chosen as the name of this new city. This toponym was previously used as the name of a district (*kecamatan*), the capital of Kerinci regency (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Kerinci, 2018). The same toponym is also used in the colonial period for the different levels of administrative regions. This

toponym was used as the capital of Afdeeling Korintji, the name of the village's federation (*mendapo*), and the name of the village (*dusun*) (van Aken, 1915).

The use of the same toponym for different meanings across societies present an important area of discussion. Place naming is a conscious act and clearly intentional, reflecting how communities assign meaning to their environment (Setyo et al., 2022). Consequently, the names of places are inherently linked to the societies in there. The names of places reflect the culture, ideology, history, and identity of their community. In this sense, toponymy is not merely a linguistic label but also a spatial representation shaped by human activities, where each place acquires distinct characteristic (Setyo et al., 2022, p. 90).

Toponymy also has a strong relationship to the landscape. In post-processual archaeology, landscape is understood as an embodied entity, as it is known, experienced, and conceptualised by its community (Sunliensyar, 2018b, p. 16). Landscape itself not only records the use of features of the landscape (river, mountains, hills, settlement, paddy fields, etc.) by humans in the past physically but also the living memory of the historical landscape (Ivascu & Stanik, 2024). Within this framework, place names function as cultural markers embedded in the landscape, reflecting how communities perceive and engage with their surroundings. On the one hand, landscapes retain toponyms assigned by past and present communities; on the other hand, these names are often derived from natural resources and prominent landscape features (Caccaciafoco & Cavallaro, 2023). Therefore, toponymy serves as an important analytical tool for understanding how landscapes are used, interpreted, and culturally constructed by human. This reciprocal relationship demonstrates that toponymy is not merely descriptive but actively participates in shaping the meaning and perception of landscapes.

Previous studies on cultural landscape of Sungai Penuh have primarily focused on architectural aspect. For instance, Hasibuan examined the landscape of *rumah larik*, the vernacular house of Kerinci in Kota Sungai Penuh. He analysed the characteristics and influencing factors of its landscape based on an architectural point of view (Hasibuan, 2010, 2014). However, this research is spatially limited to *rumah larik* as specific object within three traditional villages in Kota Sungai Penuh without addressing the broader relationship between landscape and place naming. More broadly, while studies on toponymy and landscape exist, their integration remains limited, particularly in the context of Sungai Penuh. The relationship between place names and landscape transformation has not been sufficiently explored, especially in the terms of how shifts in toponymic meanings reflect and shape changes in the landscape over time. This article addresses this gap by examining the toponym of Sungai Penuh and tracing its usage from the pre-colonial to the post-independent period by the society. It focuses on the changing meanings of the toponym and analyses how these shifts are interconnected with transformation in the landscape during that period.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in historical methodology, complemented by philological analysis and a landscape archaeological perspective.

Historical methods are used to collect and examine relevant sources, including archival documents, colonial reports, historical maps, and local manuscripts. Jawi and Incung manuscripts are treated as primary sources that preserve local historical knowledge and collective memory (Sunliensyar, 2024a, 2024c). These primary data are collected by literature review and utilised to trace the use of the toponym of Sungai Penuh diachronically. These data are supported by archaeological data that is collected by survey and observation. The surveys focused on identifying landscape features associated with the toponym, such as rivers, settlement areas, agricultural land, and other environmental elements. Observations were documented through field notes and spatial recording to establish correlations between place names and their physical contexts.

Data selection was conducted based on relevance to the research focus. For written sources, priority was given to documents explicitly mentioning “Sungai Penuh,” as well as manuscripts originating from or referring to this region. Maps were selected based on their temporal range and their representation of place names. This filtering process ensured that only data directly related to the diachronic use and meaning of the toponym were included in the analysis. To ensure data validity, this study applies source criticism through both external and internal evaluation. External criticism was conducted to assess the authenticity and origin of sources, for example by examining whether manuscripts are original or later copies, identifying their authorship, and determining their chronological context. Internal criticism was used to evaluate the credibility of the content, including consistency of narratives, linguistic features, and potential biases. For instance, variations in the use of the term “Sungai Penuh” across different manuscripts and maps were compared to identify shifts in meaning and usage.

Two main analytical approaches are employed. First, critical analysis (verification) is applied to establish the reliability of sources through internal and external criticism. Second, contextual analysis is used to interpret the use of the toponym “Sungai Penuh” within its temporal and socio-cultural contexts. This analysis situates place names within broader landscape transformations, enabling an understanding of how the same toponym may carry different meanings across periods. This study also recognises several limitations. Some manuscripts are preserved only as hand-copies writing, which may affect their reliability due to possible alterations during transmission. The transliteration of manuscript refers to Westenenk’s transliteration for Incung manuscript in 1922, and Voorhoeve’s transliteration work on heirloom manuscripts of Kerinci society in his Tambo Kerintji (TK) in 1941.

In addition, the interpretation of historical maps may be constrained by scale, projection, and colonial perspectives. Field observations reflect present landscape conditions, which may differ from past configurations. Therefore, triangulation between textual sources, maps, and archaeological observations was employed to minimise bias and strengthen the interpretation.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 The origin phrase of Sungai Penuh

Etymologically, the phrase Sungai Penuh originated from two Malay words: *sungai*, which means river, and *penuh*, which means full or never runs out. However, there are no

rivers that are called Sungai Penuh in this region. The Sungai Penuh city, of course, is surrounded by many rivers. The Sungai Bungkal flows from the Bukit Barisan in the west of the city to the centre of the capital and ends at the Batang Merao river in the east. The local community called this river Ayir Bungkal. The other river, like the Batang Sangkir river, flows from Hiang, Kerinci Regency, and ends in Tanah Kampung, a district in Sungai Penuh City. Sungai Liuk flows in the Pesisir Bukit and Hamparan Rawang districts without passing through the capital of this city.

One Jawi manuscript explains the origin of the phrase Sungai Penuh. This manuscript was written in 1923 and signed by Sultan Muhammad Syah. Voorhoeve numbered this manuscript TK 08 and identified it as a heirloom manuscript of Datuk Singarapi Sulah from Dusun Ampeh, Sungai Penuh (Voorhoeve et al., 1941). This manuscript contains the story of the ancestor community in Dusun Ampeh, that is, Datuk Singarapi and Datuk Caya Dipati, and the original names of Dusun Ampeh and Dusun Sungai Penuh. This manuscript is a hand-copied version of the older manuscript, as mentioned in the text, and may be sourced from the oral tradition of this community. This manuscript mentions:

“.....Kemudian daripada itu air bersintak surut, kedapatanlah di hilir Dusun Ampeh sebuah anak air kecil mengalir selamanya. Penuh tiada kurang-kurangnya lalu dinamakan sungai itu Sungai Penuh. Sampai sekarang tempat itu orang buat tempat mandi dan tempat sembahyang... (Voorhoeve et al., 1941, p. 7).” Translation: “...after that, the water is down, seems in downstream of Dusun Ampeh a streamlet flows evermore. The streamlet is full, never runs out, and is also called Sungai Penuh. Until nowadays, the place is used for taking a bath and praying.”

Based on the text of this manuscript, the name of Sungai Penuh originated from the name of a streamlet that flows downstream of Dusun Ampeh. This streamlet is named following its characteristic, that is, it is always full or never runs out. For the Kerinci society, the word *sungai* does not always mean river. The river in the Kerinci language is called *batang* or *ayir*, while *sungai* can mean streamlet and other small rivers (Sunliensyar, 2018c). The Sungai Penuh in the story above is believed to have kept existing until now by the community. However, the streamlet had been transformed into some wells (*sumur*). Hasibuan mentioned these wells, called Sumur Pulai, Sumur Penuh, Sumur Pinang, Sumur Tebat, Sumur Kalidea, and Sumur Sareh (Hasibuan, 2014, p. 22). It is distributed in the east of Sungai Penuh Sub-district, or Desa Gedang now. But only Sumur Pulai still exists and is used until now, while others have been covered by settlement (see **Figure 2**).



Figure 2. Sumur Pulai (Pulai Well), a remnant of Sungai Penuh streamlet, it is located in Desa Gedang, on the east side of Sungai Penuh Sub-district

Source: Hafiful Hadi Sunliensyar

3.2 Dusun Sungai Penuh, the pre-colonial village in Kerinci Valley

The existence of the Sungai Penuh streamlet in this area is applied as the name of Dusun Sungai Penuh (Sungai Penuh village) further. Dusun in Kerinci conception is a settlement surrounded by *parit sudut empat* (square trench) and settled by two or more clans. Dusun developed from a hamlet called *kuto* or established by migrant from several hamlets (*kuto*) (Sunliensyar, 2018c, 2018a, 2020). The *dusun* is led by an elected *depati*. He leads together with *depati* from another clan, but he is still holding the highest jurisprudence. He was supported by indigenous officials called *mangku* and *permanti ninik mamak*. They use the titles Datuk, Rio, *rio*, *ngebi*, *rajo* etc. for the *permanti ninik mamak* and title *mangku* for *mangku* officers. This system is known as *sko tigo takah* (Sunliensyar, 2020).

Based on Hasibuan, the Dusun Sungai Penuh consists of five clans called *limo luhah*. These five clans are Luhah Datuk Singarapi Putih, Luhah Pemangku Rajo, Luhah Rio Temenggung, Luhah Rio Jayo, and Luhah Rio Mendiho (Hasibuan, 2010, p. 32). The name of the clans is based on the name of the *permenti-ninik mamak* in each clan. In each clan, there is a *depati* who led of *permenti-ninik mamak*. However, there are two *depati* that have higher power in jurisprudence in this *dusun* that are Depati Satiudo and Depati Sungai Penuh.

There is yet scientific evidence for the absolute chronology of Dusun Sungai Penuh, but the historical document of Jambi royal charters (*piagam*) might have significance chronologically. In the past, the Jambi authority sent *piagams* to the *depati* or heads of villages to legitimise their power and territories and strengthen Jambi laws in the Jambi Highland (Gallop, 2009, 2013; Sunliensyar, 2020). The text of a certain *piagam* contains dates, which are important to determine when the *dusun* had been established. Voorhoeve reported there are four dated *piagams* that were found in 1941 related to the toponym Sungai Penuh (Voorhoeve et al., 1941, pp. 2, 18). First, the *piagam* of TK (Tambo Kerintji) 04 is kept by Datuk Caya Depati Kodrat in Dusun Baru Sungai Penuh. Second, the *piagam*

of TK 13 is kept by Datuk Singarapi Gagak in Dusun Baru Sungai Penuh. Two others, piagam of TK 22 and TK 23, are kept by Depati Payung in Dusun Pondok Tinggi.

TK 04 and TK 13 *piagams* mentioned titles Depati Satiudo and Depati Sungai Penuh as part of the receivers, and it's had a similar date of year, that is 1192 hijri or 1778 AD (Sunliensyar, 2020, p. 62). TK 22 mentioned the title Depati Payung Negeri-Sungai Penuh as the receiver had the date of the year 1116 H/1704 AD. Meanwhile, TK 23 mentioned the clause "seluruh Bungkal Pandan dalam Sungai Penuh" (all Bungkal Pandan in Sungai Penuh) had an older date of 1100 H/1688 M. However, Voorhoeve noted the text of the date in TK 23 is doubtful because it has a different handwriting from the main text.

These *piagams* indicated two points, that is: first, the toponym of Sungai Penuh had been used as the name of the area since 1688 based on the *piagam* of TK 23. This *piagam* mentioned the territory of Depati Payung Negeri, which was legitimised by Pangeran Suta Wijaya of Jambi, along the Bungkal Pandan river in Sungai Penuh. Second, the title of Depati Sungai Penuh might have been used since 1704 AD, based on TK 22, but this title is debatable due to its text being combined with "Depati Payung Negeri Sungai Penuh." There is no punctuation comma to indicate that this title was used for one person. However, at this time, the title Depati Payung Negeri and Depati Sungai Penuh is two different title that used by two officials in different villages, that is Dusun Pondok Tinggi and Dusun Sungai Penuh. TK 04 and TK 13 are clearer in mentioning the title Depati Satiudo and Depati Sungai Penuh, the two high-ranking *depati* who lead Dusun Sungai Penuh. These *piagams* indicate that Dusun Sungai Penuh had been established as a village in 1704-1778, or more than 300 years ago.

Furthermore, these *piagams* proved the influence of the Jambi Sultanate in Jambi Highland politically. Jambi controlled the community by collecting tributary called *jajah* from each *depati* for their legitimating (Sunliensyar, 2020, 2024b). Jambi authority--Sultan and Pangeran--also acted as the highest judge that decreed judgment for the unresolved issues and conflicts in Jambi Highland (Andaya, 2016). On the other side, the Jambi authority granted *depati* with title, clothes, and luxurious items (Andaya, 2016; Sunliensyar, 2020). This political relationship had occurred far from the colonial arrival in this region.

Dusun Sungai Penuh was established by the Kerinci community that claimed themselves as descendants of Siak Lengih and Dayang Beranai (Voorhoeve et al., 1941; Westenek, 1922). Based on Incung Inscriptions, their children migrated from Kuta Pandan, an ancient hamlet in the western highland of Sungai Penuh, to the valley. They made a kinship relation with other minor communities and further shaped the five clans in Dusun Sungai Penuh. Due to their relationship, each clan in Dusun Sungai Penuh has kinship relations with other villages. For example, the Rio Temenggung clan in Dusun Sungai Penuh has a kinship relation with the Rio Temenggung in Dusun Pondok Tinggi.

A traditional *dusun* in Kerinci consists of physical elements including *parit sudut empat* (square trench), *rumah larik* or *umah lahik* (Kerinci longhouse), *bilik* (granaries), cemetery complex, mosque, roads and yards, wells and riverbanks (Hasibuan, 2010, 2014; Sunliensyar, 2018c, 2020). This concept rooted from ancient settlements in megalithic period in Kerinci (Sya'adah & Wahyudi, 2024). The physical elements of Dusun Sungai

Penuh had been discussed by Hasibuan in depth (see **Figure 3**). In his research, Hasibuan described all physical elements in Dusun Sungai Penuh that showed it was qualified as a *dusun* based on *adat* regulations. This elements is similarly with the other traditional villages in Kerinci valley.



Figure 3. The Dusun Sungai Penuh Panorama Was Photographed In 1914

Source: Wereld museum digital collection, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/1020740>

3.3 Mendapo Sungai Penuh, the federation of Villages along the Bungkal Pandan River

The word *mendapo* is rooted in Sanskrit *maṇḍapaḥ*, which means a temporary hall erected on ceremonial occasions, an open hall (Apte, 1959). The word *mendapo* was loaned for calling a federation of villages (*dusun*) system in the Jambi Sultanate era in Kerinci (van Aken, 1915, p. 37). This federation was established based on kinship, ancestors' genealogy relationship, and political-economic agreement between villages (Morison, 1940; van Aken, 1915, p. 37). In the traditional system in Kerinci, there are some *mendapo* known, that is Mendapo Seleman, Mendapo Hiang, Mendapo Penawar, Mendapo Rawang, Mendapo Sungai Penuh, Mendapo Depati Tujuh, Mendapo Kemantan, and Mendapo Semurup (Sunliensyar, 2020).

A *mendapo* consists of three or more villages. One village is chosen as the capital of Mendapo. The capital of *mendapo* is the centre of indigenous government and a place for meetings of the *depati* in incorporated villages. A *depati* was elected to settle in this village as the head of the federation. He was responsible for arranging all necessary for the meeting, coordinated the *depati* in incorporated villages, and represented the incorporated *depati* to the Jambi authority. However, in the colonial period, the head of *mendapo* was elected from the *depati* in incorporated villages and replaced in periods (Morison, 1940). I assume that is why Jambi used the term *mendapo* for this system, villages federation with

the one village as the centre of meeting and might be held in the open hall (*balai* or *mendapo* land) (Klerks, 1897, p. 32).

The name of Mendapo Sungai Penuh was first mentioned in Hoogkamer's report in 1880 (Hoogkamer, 1880, pp. 61, 71). He listed three villages in this *mendapo*: Sungai Penuh, Dusun Gedang, and Pondok Tinggi. Depati Santiudo was mentioned as a representative in the incorporated *depati* in this *mendapo*. The composition of villages in this *mendapo* was changed in 1915. Van Aken listed Debai, Dusun Baru, Dusun Berenek, Sungai Penuh, Pondok Tinggi, and Kumun (see **Figure 4**) (van Aken, 1915, p. 63). The change of village composition in this *mendapo* might be discussed further. However, Dusun Sungai Penuh was chosen as the name of the *mendapo* because of its status as the capital of the *mendapo*. Hasibuan wrote that there are fields called Tanah Mendapo (*mendapo* land) in the west of Dusun Sungai Penuh, on the side of Masjid Raya Sungai Penuh (Hasibuan, 2010, p. 56, 2014, p. 21). Now, Tanah Mendapo functions as the coronation of *adat* officias in incorporated villages in Mendapo Sungai Penuh.

The use of the name capital of *mendapo* as the name of *mendapo* itself is also seen in other *mendapo* in Kerinci. The Mendapo Semurup consists of Dusun Semurup, Dusun Siulak, Dusun Pendung, Dusun Baru, and others. Dusun Semurup was chosen as the capital of *mendapo* and used as the name of *mendapo* (Sunliensyar, 2020). The Mendapo Hiang consists of Dusun Hiang Tinggi, Koto Baru, Betung Kuning, and Ambai. Dusun Hiang Tinggi was chosen as the capital of *mendapo* and used as the name of *mendapo* (Morison, 1940). The Mendapo Seleman consists of Dusun Seleman, Dusun Tanjung Tanah, Tebing Tinggi, and Cupak. Dusun Seleman was chosen as the capital of *mendapo* and used as the name of *mendapo*.

Based on TK 13 of *piagam* Jambi mentioned above, the Mendapo Sungai Penuh was established from villages throughout Sungai Bungkal Pandan and around it. The text of *piagam* mentions this region and its boundaries in detail:

"..... seluruh Sungai Bungkal Pandan bermula perbatasan sebelah ke hulu dengan Bujang Pand[i]jam Sekungkung Mati dan ke hilirnya perbatasan dengan Depati Bendaharo, sebelah darat dengan Sialang Balantak Besi dan kebaruhnya perbatasan dengan Tunggak Raja, Kemantan Mati, lalu menuju Palis Serumpun lalu menuju Lubuk Tuba2 lalu menuju Aur Berlarik itulah adanya (Voorhoeve et al., 1941, p. 18)." Translation: "...all Bungkal Pandan River, beginning its boundary in upstream with Bujang Pandiam, Sekungkung Mati, and to downstream is bordered with Depati Bendaharo, to the upland with Sialang Balantak Besi, and to lowland is bordered with Tunggak Raja, Kemantan Mati, and then to Palis Serumpun, and then toward Lubuk Tuba-Tuba and then toward Aur Belarik that is how it is.

Although this *piagam* does not mention the name of the village in this region, we can analyse these villages from a colonial map of the landscape of Korintji in 1915. The villages along the Bungkal Pandan River are Dusun Pondok Tinggi, Dusun Sungai Penuh, Dusun Baru, Dusun Berenek, and Dusun Empih. Moreover, the villages in the southern boundaries are Kumun and Debai. The status of Dusun Berenek and Dusun Empih is still debatable

within their community. This is because this village is only settled by one clan. Dusun Berenek is settled by the clan (Luhah) of Rio Mangku Bumi, and Dusun Empih is settled by the clan (Luhah) of Datuk Singarapi. Meanwhile, based on general indigenous regulation in Kerinci, there is no *dusun* settled by one clan, and it has to be settled by two or more (Sunliensyar, 2020; Sunliensyar & Azizah, 2024). They assumed that Dusun Berenek has a *depati* in Dusun Sungai Penuh (part of Dusun Sungai Penuh) and Dusun Empih has *depati* in Dusun Baru (part of Dusun Baru). Consequently, there are only three villages throughout the Bungkal Pandan River and two villages on the southeast border.

This region is led by a federation of seven *depati* that are Depati Satiudo, Depati Payung Negeri, Depati Sungai Penuh, Depati Simpan Negeri, Depati Pahlawan Negara, Depati Nyato Negara, and Depati Alam Negeri. In their relationship with Jambi, they were called as *pegawai rajo-pegawai jenang* (the servants of the king and envoys). They were tasked with taking care of the needs of the king and his envoys while they were in Kerinci. Meanwhile, in Dusun Kumun and Debai later became autonomous villages based on the *piagam* Jambi was sent by Pangeran Temenggung Kebul di Bukit between 1792-1794 M, fourteen years after the *piagam* of TK 13 (Sunliensyar, 2020, p. 68). Two villages were led by four *depati*, that is, Depati Nyato Negro, Depati Simpan Negeri, Depati Galang Negeri, and Depati Sempurno Bumi Putih.

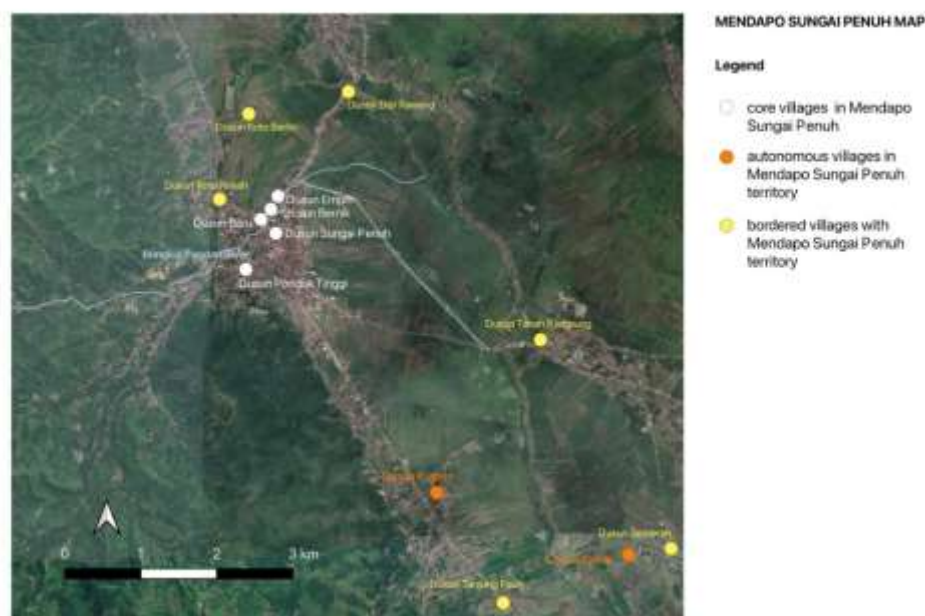


Figure 4. Mendapo Sungai Penuh and its boundaries
Source: Qqis, processed by Hafiful Hadi Sunliensyar

The composition of villages in Mendapo Sungai Penuh is dynamic, depending on the political situation, but the status of its capital does not change. This special status as capital may be influenced by two factors. First, the strategic position is geographically. A capital of *mendapo* connected intervillage in *mendapo* efficiently and effectively. Second, the historic-

political factor, such as the *depati* in the capital of *mendapo*, which had earlier obtained a *piagam* from Jambi or a village (*dusun*) that was earlier established than others. Hence, the village was agreed as the capital of *mendapo*.

3.4 Sungai Penuh During the Colonial Period

After Kerinci was annexed by the Dutch through a military expedition in 1903 (Sunliensyar, 2025; van Aken, 1915). The Dutch was reorganised the bureaucratic structure in this region based on government regulation and adapted it to the indigenous system. In 1906, Kerinci was being *afdeeling* region under the Jambi Residentie. This status was changed a year later to Onder-afdeeling Koerintji under Afdeeling of Djambi-Bovenlanden. This Onder-afdeeling is divided into seven districts with the capital of government in Sanggaran Agung (van Aken, 1915, p. 39). However, in 1909, after an earthquake catastrophe shook Kerinci, the capital of Onder-Afdeeling Koerintji was moved to Mendapo Sungai Penuh (van Aken, 1915, p. 39).

There is no explanation why the capital of the government was moved to Sungai Penuh. This might be closely related to earthquake impact, the new urban planning, geographic, and economic factors. Mendapo Sungai Penuh has supported the geographic condition. Its land is a vast plain compared to Sanggaran Agung. The government could construct the buildings massively and arrange urban planning based on colonial architecture. Mendapo Sungai Penuh was also the gate that connected Kerinci to Padang through ground transportation. Even the distance between Kerinci and Padang is closer than the distance between Kerinci and Jambi. Van Aken wrote that trading activity is more frequent among the Kerinci society in Padang and coastal West Sumatra than in Jambi.

In 1913, a significant change in the administrative status of Kerinci was made. Onder-afdeeling Koerinci was raised by Afdeeling Korintji. The districts in this Afdeeling were reduced to two districts, that is Kerintji Ulu and Kerintji Ilir. However, in 1921, Afdeeling Korintji was expelled from Djambi Residentie and merged with Sumatra Westkust Residentie. The new Afdeeling, Afdeeling Kerintji-Painan, was established, but does not change the status of Sungai Penuh as its capital. Nevertheless, the status of Afdeeling Korintji was lowered by District Kerintji under Onder-Afdeeling Kerintji-Indrapura. The economic factor seems to have influenced the consideration of this decision. As explained above, the relation between Kerinci and Padang is closer both geographically and economically. The merger of Kerinci with Sumatra Westkust strengthened and simplified economic and social control by the colonial government in Kerinci.



Figure 5. In the left Dusun Sungai Penuh and Pondok Tinggi map in 1907. Seems similar to another traditional village in Kerinci. On the right, the Sungai Penuh map in 1923-1924, seems a colonial modern city (red squares) between Dusun Sungai Penuh, Pondok Tinggi, and Dusun Baru.
Source: D D 20,5 and D D 44,4 Map, digital collection of Leiden University Libraries

Sungai Penuh in this period was not only a name of *dusun* and *mendapo*, but also a name for a new city that was reconstructed by the colonial government. Sungai Penuh was constructed as the centre of government and economy for Kerinci and a major part of coastal Sumatra Westkust. Its landscape was changed from one traditional local federation to be the centre of colonial government for Afdeeling Korintji and Kerintji-Painan (see **Figure 5** and **Figure 6**). The change of its status was followed by a significant change in landscape features. Paddy fields and farms around of *dusun* were replaced by the colonial buildings, markets, and other supporting infrastructure. Of course, Sungai Penuh has a more significant role than before.

3.5 From the Capital of Kerinci Regency to the Autonomous City

As a legacy of colonialism, there was no significant change in the status of Sungai Penuh in early independence. In 1948, Sumatra was divided into three provinces: Sumatra Utara, Sumatra Tengah, and Sumatra Selatan. Sungai Penuh was still kept in its status as the capital of Pesisir Selatan-Kerintji Regency (Kabupaten) in Sumatra Tengah Province (Kementerian Penerangan, 1954, p. 363). This regency consists of districts (*kewedanan*), including Kerintji, Balai Selasa, and Painan. In 1958, the new provinces were established, including Jambi Province (Margono et al., 1984, pp. 5–6). Kerinci was raised to the status of a regency and merged with Jambi Province, with some regencies from Sumatra Tengah Province before.

Sungai Penuh has been the capital of Kerinci Regency for fifty years. The President of the Republic of Indonesia, Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, legitimized Sungai Penuh as a new autonomous city in Jambi Province. The establishment of this city was legitimized through Laws of the Republic of Indonesia number 25 of the year 2008 regarding the establishment of Sungai Penuh City in Jambi Province. This city was established from five districts (*kecamatan*) of Kerinci Regency, including Sungai Penuh District, Pesisir Bukit District, Hamparan Rawang District, Tanah Kampung District, and Kumun-Debai District. Its districts have flourished to eight districts with the addition of Pondok Tinggi District, Koto Baru District, and Sungai Bungkal District. These districts consist of 65 villages and 4 sub-districts (*kelurahan*) (Julianti & Suhermin, 2026, pp. 6–7).

The establishment of Sungai Penuh City has changed the landscape significantly. Sungai Penuh was only a district and the capital of Kerinci Regency before but now encompasses the eight districts. If we compare with the indigenous system, this city encompasses three *mendapo*, including Mendapo Sungai Penuh, Mendapo Rawang, and Mendapo Tanah Kampung. The meaning of the phrase Sungai Penuh in the current perspective is not limited to the boundaries of Sungai Penuh district before but also includes the boundaries of eight districts or three *mendapo* in the past. Its case is an example of how the political aspect could change the landscape significantly.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the toponym of Sungai Penuh has three different meanings based on the current administrative region. Sungai Penuh could mean the name of a sub-district (*kelurahan*), the name of a district (*kecamatan*), and the name of a city. This is no surprise if we consider the long history of this toponym. Consequently, the mention of this toponym must include the mention of its administrative status, so there is no ambiguous meaning to it.

3.6 The change of landscape in the Eternal Toponym

Based on manuscripts, it indicates that the use of the toponym Sungai Penuh has persisted for more than 300 years within the local community. Initially, the name derived from a distinctive feature in a *dusun* landscape, characterised by full of water streamlet. This suggests that the community consciously selected a salient natural feature in their surroundings as a marker of place identity and the name of their settlement (Caccaciafoco & Cavallaro, 2023). In this context, the toponym does not merely describe the landscape but reflects how the community perceived and differentiated itself from neighbouring groups. The naming practice therefore represents an early stage in the construction of a landscape-based identity, in which natural resource was transformed into social marker.

Over time, this relationship between toponymy and landscape became increasingly intertwined with social and political structures. In its process, the historical aspect also plays an important role. Dusun Sungai Penuh was considered and elected as the centre of villages (*dusun-dusun*) on the Bungkal Pandan riverscape. Based on local narratives, they believed that Dusun Sungai Penuh was the original village (*dusun*) of the community that established other villages on the Bungkal Pandan riverscape after their ancestors' migration from Koto Pandan. In addition, *depati* from Dusun Sungai Penuh was the first legitimized leader by the Jambi authority. Therefore, they regarded Dusun Sungai Penuh as having more eminent status than others. As Reuter, in Austronesian-speaking people, local histories of ancestral origins and migration are crucially important in claiming, determining status, and rights on the land (Reuter, 2006, pp. 11–12). The eminent status of Dusun Sungai Penuh is marked by a meeting field called Tanah Mendapo as its distinctive feature in the landscape.

During the colonial period, transformation in the landscape were closely linked to shifts in economic and political priorities, which in turn reshaped the meaning and the function of the toponym. The introduction of a capitalist economic system reoriented spatial pattern towards efficiency and accesibility. The policies formulated were based on getting as many economic advantages as possible. Mendapo Sungai Penuh was selected by the colonial government as the new capital of its government in Kerinci. It is not only because of its pre-existing socio-political significance, but also economic consideration. Mendapo

Sungai Penuh was in the upland, with the plain characterized by land. From an economic perspective, the cost of constructing the new city in this region is lower than in another region. This is because most of the region in Kerinci is in lowland, swampy land, or hilly terrain that requires more cost for modifying the land. Besides that, as discussed above, Mendapo Sungai Penuh is the only region that connects Kerinci with Padang, the gateway to entering Sumatra Westkust Residentie, and has shorter mileage to Padang. In colonial perspective, it's having economic advantages for the long term. Finally, in this consideration, the government then merged Kerinci into the Sumatra Westkust Residentie.

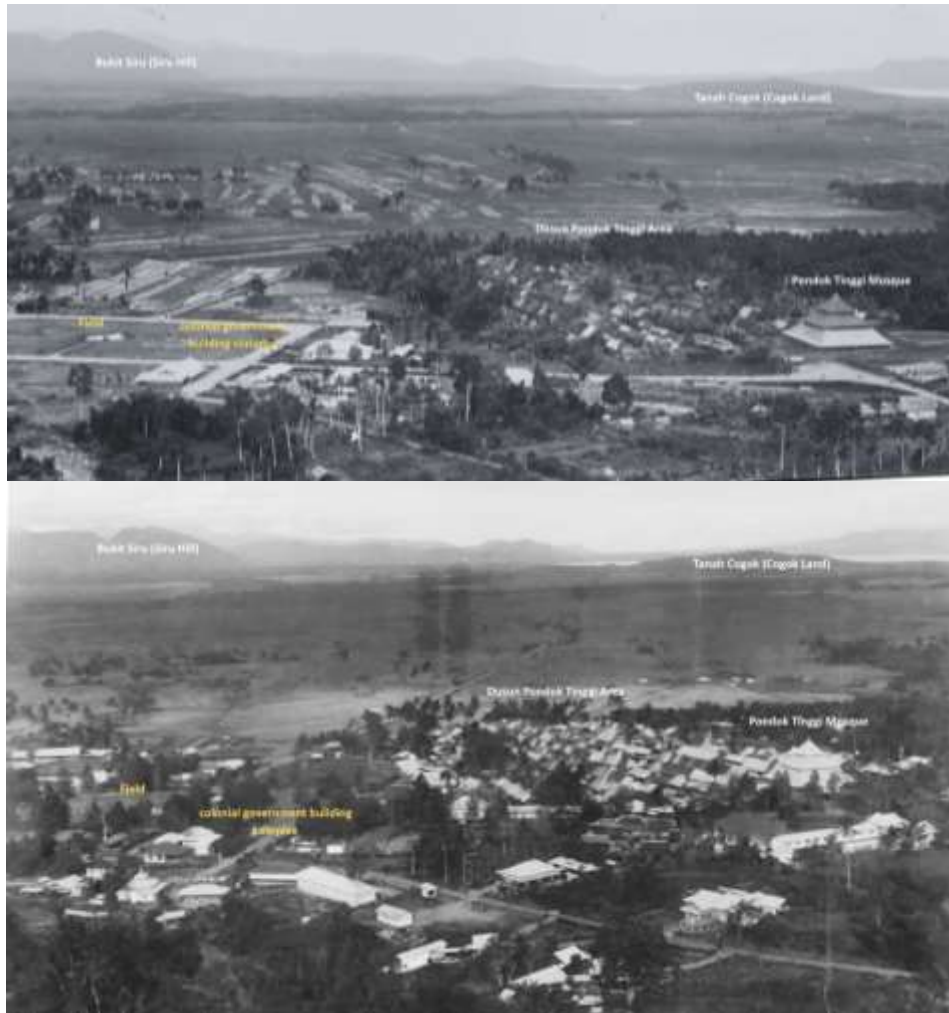


Figure 6. Landscape Colonial Urban City In Sungai Penuh, 1914 (Top) And 1935 (Bottom). It Seems To Be A Massive Colonial Building In The Northern Part Of Dusun Pondok Tinggi.

Source: Wereldculturen museum digital collection and Bouman, 1935

This shift indicates that the toponym “Sungai Penuh” underwent a process of semantic expansion: from denoting a local environmental feature, to representing a central settlement with political authority, and eventually to functioning as an administrative and economic hub within a broader colonial network. Thus, landscape transformation did not merely accompany changes in naming but actively redefined the meaning of the toponym in relation to evolving social, political, and economic structures.

During colonial period, the Sungai Penuh landscape underwent significant transformation marked by the construction of colonial buildings and various colonial infrastructures. These developments were primarily established on former farmland and paddy fields located between Dusun Sungai Penuh and Pondok Tinggi, as well as on the northern side of Dusun Pondok Tinggi (see **Figure 6**). As a result, the spatial organisation of the area diverged markedly from other *mendapo* in Kerinci, reflecting the imposition of a new colonial spatial order. Over approximately four decades, intensive development reshaped the traditional *dusun* landscape into a more structured colonial urban centre. This transformation is evident in photographic documentation from 1914 and 1930 (see **Figures 5 and 6**), which illustrate the shift from a dispersed settlement pattern to a more centralised and infrastructurally organised city.

In the post-independence period, the continuation of a capitalist-oriented development model by the Republic government led to increasingly intensive construction activities. This process accelerated the transformation of the Sungai Penuh landscape, gradually replacing elements of traditional and colonial spatial configurations with modern infrastructure. As a result, the historical layers of the landscape have become fragmented, with only selected remnants of traditional and colonial heritage remaining visible. This transformation indicates a shift in the functional and symbolic value of the landscape, where modern development priorities reshape not only the physical environment but also the way past landscapes are preserved and perceived. In this context, the surviving elements of traditional and colonial heritage in Sungai Penuh can be understood as residual markers of earlier spatial orders, embedded within an increasingly modernised urban landscape.

This landscape transformation also had implications for the persistence and reinterpretation of the toponym “Sungai Penuh.” Rather than being replaced, the toponym was maintained and expanded in meaning, indicating its adaptability within changing socio-political contexts. Two main factors explain this continuity. First, within the indigenous system of Kerinci society, there exists a tradition of extending the name of a central settlement to represent a wider territorial or federative unit. This pattern is not unique to Sungai Penuh but is also observed in other *mendapo*, and parallels can be found in broader Malay political traditions, such as the Jambi and Palembang Sultanates, where territorial entities were named after their capitals (Andaya, 2016). In this sense, the persistence of the toponym reflects a culturally embedded spatial logic that links naming practices with territorial organisation.

Second, the continued use of the toponym is closely tied to political agency in the modern period. The establishment of Sungai Penuh City as a new administrative unit illustrates how toponymy can be strategically mobilised to assert continuity, legitimacy, and identity. The role of local elite actors, particularly Fauzi Si'in, who originated from Dusun Sungai Penuh, highlights how political influence can reinforce and institutionalise existing place names (Budhi, 2015; Kisananda, 2024).

Taken together, these processes demonstrate that the toponym “Sungai Penuh” is not merely a passive remnant of the past, but an active element in the production of space. Its persistence across pre-colonial, colonial, and modern periods reflects an ongoing

negotiation between landscape transformation, cultural tradition, and political power. Thus, the continuity of the toponym reveals how naming practices both respond to and shape changing social and spatial configurations.

4. Conclusion

The Kerinci community in Bungkal Pandan riverscape has long used the toponym Sungai Penuh for the name of their *dusun*, deriving it from a distinctive natural feature characterised by the natural source at a time as a distinctive feature in that landscape. This naming practice reflects a conscious effort to construct a landscape-based identity, allowing the community to differentiate itself from other groups within the same riverscape. The persistence of this toponym for more than three centuries—from the pre-colonial to the post-independence period—demonstrates the enduring influence of both indigenous naming systems and subsequent political processes.

The diachronic use of the toponym “Sungai Penuh” also reveals how landscape transformations are closely intertwined with socio-political developments. Initially referring to an ordinary *dusun*, the name gradually became associated with increasing political and administrative significance, first as the centre of a *mendapo* and later as the capital of the colonial administration in Kerinci. These shifts were accompanied by substantial changes in the landscape, from a traditional rural settlement to a colonial urban centre, and eventually to a modern city shaped by economic and political forces. In this context, the toponym functions not only as a geographical label but also as a dynamic marker of spatial hierarchy, authority, and historical memory. This study highlights the importance of toponymy as an analytical tool for understanding the interaction between landscape, society, and power over time. By integrating historical, philological, and archaeological approaches, it demonstrates how place names can bridge textual and spatial evidence in reconstructing environmental and socio-cultural histories.

Finally, the case of Sungai Penuh illustrates the layered and multi-scalar nature of toponymy, where a single name can simultaneously refer to different administrative units—*dusun*, *kelurahan*, *kecamatan*, and city—each with distinct spatial boundaries. While this multiplicity may create ambiguity, it also underscores the enduring cultural significance of the toponym as a unifying marker of identity across changing historical contexts. Future research could further explore similar dynamics in other regions to better understand how toponymy operates within broader processes of landscape transformation and political change.

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