

Inclusive Participatory Public Administration: Marginalized Communities along Karang Mumus River, Samarinda

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of riverside residents along the Karang Mumus River (SKM) in facing revitalization and relocation processes, and analyzes the extent to which the SKM revitalization policy has adopted participatory and inclusive principles of public administration. It also aims to construct a context-based conceptual model of inclusive public administration that integrates the protection of basic rights, deliberative participation, and multi-actor collaboration. Using an interpretive qualitative approach and an exploratory case study method, the research maps the experiences of marginalized residents during the planning and implementation phases of the revitalization program, which directly affect their right to housing, livelihoods, and access to basic services. The findings reveal that public participation tends to be formalistic, protection of residents' rights remains limited, and while NGOs and academics are actively involved, their roles are still fragmented. This study concludes that an inclusive model of public administration must simultaneously integrate three critical pillars: the protection of socio-economic rights, meaningful deliberative participation, and the facilitation of collaborative dialogue among policy actors. The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of the Three Pillars of Inclusivity Model, which serves as a conceptual framework for achieving socially just and community-rooted policy governance.

Keywords: Karang Mumus River; revitalization; inclusive public administration; deliberative participation; basic rights; policy collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary public administration is not only required to perform its functions efficiently and effectively, but also bears responsibility for ensuring social justice and citizen inclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups, in the policymaking process. The idea of Inclusive Public Administration has emerged as a response to governance practices that tend to be elitist and technocratic, often neglecting the voices of the poor and marginalized (Frederickson, 1990; Roberts, 2004). In urban contexts, slum upgrading and riverbank revitalization projects exemplify how policies claimed to serve the “public interest” frequently generate social exclusion. In many Indonesian cities, eviction projects carried out under the banner of spatial planning often sacrifice the basic rights of residents in affected areas.

One of the most striking cases is the revitalization of the Karang Mumus River (SKM) in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. As a tributary of the Mahakam River, SKM plays a vital role in the city's drainage system. However, since the early 2000s, its surrounding areas have faced severe ecological pressures due to uncontrolled urbanization, the proliferation of informal settlements, and river sedimentation. In response, the Samarinda City Government launched the SKM normalization and revitalization project, which included riverbank widening, the development of green corridors, and the relocation of residents living along the banks. The project was positioned as a strategic solution to mitigate recurrent floods burdening the city, while simultaneously reorganizing densely populated neighborhoods deemed spatially “disorderly.” Yet, behind this development narrative, the project left unresolved issues related

to procedural justice and citizen participation. According to reports by local NGOs and media outlets, more than 600 households along the SKM were displaced without meaningful involvement in the planning process. Residents reported that they were merely “informed” of predetermined decisions rather than engaged in the co-creation of solutions.

This finding resonates with Muhammad (2021) in the *Borneo Administrator Journal*, which highlights that the lack of two-way communication and limited consultation mechanisms were the primary causes of low public trust in the project. Similarly, research by Putri and Hidayat (2023) shows that slum-upgrading projects in Indonesia tend to be technocratic, disregarding spatial justice and citizens’ rights to the city. The crisis of trust has been further exacerbated by the persistence of flooding, even after portions of the revitalization project were completed. Data from the Samarinda City Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) as of May 2025 reported that 4,414 individuals (1,235 households) across three SKM riverbank sub-districts were affected by flooding. With water levels reaching up to 1.7 meters, the flood not only submerged homes but also disrupted local economic activities, education, and public services. During the same period, extreme rainfall intensity reached 83 mm per hour, compounded by the backwater effect of the Mahakam River. Previously, between 2008 and 2023, Samarinda experienced 82 major floods that inundated more than 52,950 houses, claimed four lives, and injured nine others. These figures demonstrate that structural measures alone—without participatory reforms—are insufficient to address the root causes of flooding and social vulnerability in the area.

Furthermore, the government’s approach did not include adequate social protection schemes. Displaced residents lost not only their homes but also their sources of livelihood, such as street vending, scavenging, and daily wage labor, along with access to essential services such as clean water, sanitation, and education. This condition indicates the absence of meaningful participation, in which citizens are not granted deliberative spaces to express aspirations, propose alternatives, or contest decisions that directly affect their lives. They lost not only their physical space but also their social, cultural, and political rights to the city. This reality reflects a systemic failure to adopt the core principles of inclusive public administration in urban policymaking. On the one hand, the government faces technical pressures to control flooding and manage urban planning; on the other hand, it also carries social and constitutional obligations to protect vulnerable groups and guarantee citizens’ rights to the city fairly and equitably. The tension between administrative efficiency and social justice thus becomes a critical point in evaluating the SKM revitalization project as a public policy.

Based on this background, this study aims to:

- [a] explore the lived experiences of SKM riverbank residents in facing the revitalization and relocation process;
- [b] analyze the extent to which the SKM revitalization policy has incorporated principles of participatory and inclusive public administration; and
- [c] construct a conceptual model of inclusive public administration rooted in the local context, integrating the protection of basic rights, deliberative participation, and inter-actor collaboration in public decision-making.

METHODS

This study employed an interpretive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the social meanings embedded in the public policy practices of the Karang Mumus River (SKM) revitalization, from the perspectives of the actors involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). An exploratory case study method was adopted, focusing on the conflicts surrounding the relocation of riverbank residents as a complex and context-specific phenomenon.

Data were collected through three primary techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 key informants, consisting of affected residents, community leaders, NGO activists, and officials from the Department of Public Works and Housing (PUPR) as well as the Social Services Agency of Samarinda City. Second, participant observation was carried out in neighborhood deliberation forums (*musyawarah warga*) and community (RW) meetings to capture social interactions and residents' expressions regarding the policy. Third, policy document analysis was undertaken, examining the Samarinda Spatial Plan (RTRW), the Mahakam Watershed Management Program, gubernatorial decrees on riverbank management, and the city's Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) as the formal policy foundation.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), including coding, pattern identification, and the interpretation of meanings within informants' narratives. This approach enabled the identification of key themes such as participatory exclusion, spatial justice, and residents' responses to relocation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Formalistic Participation

The findings reveal that citizen participation in the Karang Mumus River (SKM) revitalization project was dominated by formalistic and top-down practices rather than dialogic or deliberative engagement. At various stages of the project—such as relocation socialization or spatial planning—residents were invited merely to attend one-way informational forums organized by the government. No consultative spaces were identified that allowed for meaningful feedback or citizen aspirations. Based on observations and documentation from community deliberation meetings in March 2024, these events resembled the delivery of instructions rather than policy negotiations. Such participation reflects administrative ritualism, echoing Arnstein's (1969) "tokenism" model. Citizen involvement was directed more toward policy acceptance than toward co-designing or selecting alternative policy options.

As one neighborhood leader stated:

"We were only invited to meetings after all plans had already been decided. Residents were simply asked to attend, listen, and sign the attendance sheet. There was no space to ask questions, let alone to reject the plan."

This indicates that residents' presence functioned more as procedural legitimacy than as substantive engagement in decision-making. In some cases, residents admitted they did not understand the documents or spatial maps presented, as these were neither explained openly nor in accessible language.

The absence of transparency and dialogical mechanisms further eroded trust in the government. Several residents disclosed that they learned about the eviction only weeks before implementation. One female informant who had lived along SKM for 25 years recounted:

"We heard from a neighbor working at the sub-district office, not from the government directly. When we asked when we had to move, they just said 'as soon as possible,' without clarity about housing."

Such practices contradict the principles of inclusive public administration, which, according to Roberts (2004), require information transparency, deliberative spaces, and inter-actor collaboration, particularly with affected groups. Consequently, the Samarinda City Government failed to foster citizen ownership of the project, treating residents as objects rather than subjects of development. The absence of accessible grievance mechanisms further reinforced this exclusion. As one NGO activist remarked:

"There was never any participatory survey. If residents protested, they were accused of rejecting development."

This illustrates how the revitalization policy prioritized technocratic approaches over deliberative principles, risking protracted social conflict.

2. Loss of Basic Rights

Post-relocation, affected residents experienced significant deprivation of basic rights—particularly housing, livelihoods, and access to essential services. Interviews with 10 displaced residents revealed that seven lacked clarity about new housing arrangements after demolition. Most only received limited compensation—averaging IDR 10–15 million—which was insufficient to purchase or rent new housing nearby. One 53-year-old male informant shared:

"After our house was demolished, we had to stay with relatives. The compensation money was not enough to buy land or rebuild a house."

This underscores the absence of adequate housing protection schemes within the relocation process.

Socioeconomic impacts were also severe. Many residents had previously earned their livelihoods through small-scale vending, scavenging, or daily wage labor, dependent on local networks and proximity to markets. After relocation, most lost these sources of income. A housewife who had run a small stall explained:

"I had to close my stall because there were no buyers in the new place. All my customers used to come from this neighborhood."

This highlights how relocation without economic mitigation created new vulnerabilities among the urban poor.

Moreover, access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and education became critical challenges. Observations in relocation areas found that families struggled to enroll children in nearby schools due to unstable domiciles. In Temindung Permai, two displaced residents reported having to

rely on costly water-sharing from neighbors or daily purchases of bottled water. One female informant lamented:

“We used to have our own well and sanitation facilities, now we have to queue at other people’s houses.”

These conditions demonstrate the lack of a holistic *resettlement life recovery plan*. The absence of social safeguards violated citizens’ constitutional rights under Article 28H of the 1945 Indonesian Constitution, which guarantees adequate housing and a healthy environment. Furthermore, UN-Habitat (2023) emphasizes that in the pursuit of just urbanization, all residents—including those in informal settlements—are entitled to the *right to the city*, encompassing access to space, services, and decision-making. In the SKM case, these rights were undermined by a policy framework prioritizing aesthetics and flood control over long-term social protection.

3. The Role of NGOs and Academia

Local NGOs played a critical role as communication intermediaries between residents and government. The Green Kalimantan Foundation, for instance, accompanied affected residents since the onset of evictions in 2020. Interviews with two NGO leaders revealed their routine facilitation of community discussions, policy monitoring reports, and correspondence with government institutions to demand clarity on citizens’ rights. As one activist explained:

“We tried to make sure residents were not alone in facing this. We documented the process, then advocated it to the local parliament and city government.”

NGOs became vital sources of legal information and social rights for residents who lacked access to policy documents or formal decision-making spaces. Their advocacy also involved legal awareness-raising, enabling residents to critically evaluate policy processes. During neighborhood forums observed between 2023 and 2024, NGOs actively facilitated deliberations and explained regulations such as the RTRW, gubernatorial decrees on the Mahakam watershed, and relocation rights under Ministerial Regulation PUPR No. 11/PRT/M/2019. As one resident noted:

“We didn’t know where to go before. After joining discussions, we realized that we also have rights protected by law.”

Academics, particularly from Mulawarman University and 17 August University in Samarinda, also voiced the need for participatory approaches in SKM planning. Their research and opinion pieces—published in local media and scholarly outlets—emphasized spatial justice and communication failures. One planning lecturer interviewed stated:

“If this revitalization is to be sustainable, residents must be partners from the outset. This is not only about flooding, but also about social sustainability.”

Academics strengthened citizen critiques by providing data-driven and theoretical arguments, contributing to the broader policy discourse. However, collaboration between NGOs and academics remained fragmented and lacked institutionalization within formal policymaking. This absence of

structured deliberative forums weakened opportunities for integrating local and scientific knowledge into urban governance, aligning with Healey's (2012) call for *knowledge-based planning*. Ideally, such collaboration should be recognized as part of the *co-production of urban governance* rather than as supplementary to technocratic policy processes.

4. The Need for Inclusive Platforms

A key finding of this study is the absence of inclusive dialogue platforms between government and affected communities. Residents perceived existing forums as formalities without meaningful opportunities to voice aspirations. Of the 15 informants interviewed, 11 stated they were only invited to one-way information sessions, not genuine dialogues. A community leader from Temindung Permai emphasized :

"We were only told, not asked. The decisions were already made, and we just had to accept them."

This communication gap underscores the need for deliberative spaces that genuinely listen to residents, not simply deliver finalized policies. Ideally, inclusive platforms should guarantee citizen involvement at every policy stage—from planning to evaluation. Observations at neighborhood forums showed that when discussions were openly facilitated, residents proposed constructive ideas, including community-based relocation and compensation through public facilities. A 42-year-old resident remarked:

"If there was a real forum, we could give ideas. We know the situation on the ground."

Yet, without government institutional support, such forums remained sporadic, driven by local initiatives or NGO facilitation. This highlights the need for an *institutionalized participatory mechanism*, as recommended in justice-oriented governance (Fainstein, 2010).

Moreover, inclusive platforms are crucial for bridging diverse actors—residents, NGOs, academics, and technical agencies. In the SKM case, no cross-actor forum enabled sustained public deliberation. Fung and Wright (2003) argue that *empowered participatory governance* requires institutional structures enabling active citizen involvement in solving collective problems. The lack of such spaces has produced policy fragmentation and widened gaps between state-driven development logic and residents' lived realities. The absence of neutral facilitators—either from government or third parties—further constrained fair mediation of conflicting perspectives.

Therefore, institutional initiatives are urgently needed to establish structured and inclusive deliberative platforms, such as a Karang Mumus watershed communication forum involving all stakeholders equally. This could serve as a venue for residents' grievances, humane relocation designs, and equitable spatial planning revisions. As one Social Services officer admitted:

"If there was an official forum, it would be easier for us to listen and directly record community needs."

Building such platforms is not merely administrative but a commitment to participatory democracy and social justice in urban governance.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that inclusivity in SKM policymaking remains limited to *procedural inclusion*—involving residents in socialization forums without granting them real influence over decisions. This reflects Samarinda’s failure to fully implement inclusive public administration, defined by Svava and Denhardt (2010, p. 139) as governance that “acknowledges diversity, reduces inequalities in access, and broadens participatory space for marginalized groups in policymaking.”

Citizen participation in the SKM revitalization was formalistic, confined to neighborhood forums lacking deliberative power. This administrative ritualism aligns with Arnstein’s (1969) “tokenism,” where residents’ roles are restricted to passive recipients rather than active co-creators of policy. Limited access to technical project information, short discussion timeframes, and official dominance in forums signaled weak citizen engagement.

These practices diverge from deliberative principles emphasizing open, equal, and rational spaces for forming collective opinion and will (Habermas, 1996). As Dryzek (2000) underscores, effective public deliberation requires “communicative settings that are inclusive, reasoned, and consequential.” In SKM, no structured forums were found to capture citizens’ aspirations across planning, implementation, and evaluation. This left residents without legitimate channels for democratic resistance, resulting in passive or informal responses. The government’s role emerged as coercive rather than deliberative, contradicting inclusive public administration ideals of *co-production* (Bourgon, 2011).

Exclusionary practices also produced serious rights violations, including the loss of housing, livelihoods, and public services. This illustrates the state’s failure to uphold constitutional guarantees. Lefebvre’s (1996) concept of the *right to the city*—the right to access, use, and reshape urban space—was neglected in the name of modernization and flood control. As Fainstein (2010) stresses, urban justice requires development to be not only efficient and aesthetic but also fair and inclusive of vulnerable groups.

The role of NGOs and academics proved significant in resisting these exclusionary dynamics. NGOs acted as advocacy agents and resident companions, aligning with Fung and Wright’s (2003) *empowered participatory governance* model. Academics contributed evidence-based critiques and alternative policy designs, resonating with Fischer’s (2009) view that deliberative policymaking requires mediation from *epistemic communities*. Together, NGOs and academics functioned as “representative deliberators” (Dryzek, 2000), amplifying residents’ voices in policy arenas otherwise inaccessible to marginalized communities.

Ultimately, the core issue identified is the absence of inclusive deliberative platforms. Without institutionalized two-way communication channels, residents were excluded from shaping policies directly affecting their lives. Gaventa (2006) asserts that “inclusive spaces of participation are not only sites of engagement but also of transformation.” In SKM, policy remained exclusive, privileging technocratic development logics over social justice. Establishing inclusive citizen forums is therefore urgent to transform urban governance into a more democratic and just system.

CONCLUSION

The revitalization of the Karang Mumus River (SKM) in Samarinda demonstrates that public policies targeting the living spaces of vulnerable communities continue to operate within a technocratic

and procedural logic, with citizen participation largely formalistic and symbolic. This study found that affected residents experienced the loss of fundamental rights,

including adequate housing and economic access, without sufficient compensation. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and academics played a significant role in fostering alternative deliberative spaces, yet their involvement has not been systematically institutionalized within policy mechanisms. These findings reveal that the principles of *inclusive public administration* (Bourgon, 2011), *deliberative participation* (Fung, 2006), and *justice-oriented urban governance* (Fainstein, 2010) have not been fully integrated into the governance practices of the SKM revitalization. Consequently, the need for inclusive platforms that facilitate dialogue between residents, government, and non-state actors is urgent in order to ensure both justice and policy sustainability.

This study is limited by the scope of its research site and the relatively short observation period, which did not capture long-term post-relocation dynamics. Furthermore, not all government actors could be interviewed in depth due to time and access constraints. Future revitalization and resettlement initiatives should be designed through genuine participatory processes and comprehensive socio-economic impact assessments. Local governments are encouraged to establish citizen–government forums facilitated by independent third parties, such as universities or NGOs, to create neutral and inclusive deliberative spaces. Moreover, it is crucial to integrate the principle of the *right to the city* into spatial planning policies, as recognition of citizens’ collective rights to their living spaces. Another key recommendation is to train civil servants in socially inclusive communication and policy mediation techniques, enabling them to manage conflicts through more humanistic approaches. Taken together, these measures are expected to foster urban governance that is fairer, more collaborative, and more responsive to the needs of marginalized groups.

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