

# How Public Policy Making Process is Challenged by Networks in the Pandemic Era?

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**Abstract**—The Covid-19 pandemic has shocked millions of people in the world and hindered public sector development not to mention the way the governments formulate the public policy making process. In handling the spread of the virus, the ultimate goal of government is responsible to decrease the casualties and also the number of deaths. However, the government let alone in fact has been facing social, political and economic constraints. The question is how the governments involve the other stakeholders relevant to tackle the problems? One alternative solution is to enlarge, involve and collaborate the other actors who in charge in formulating public policy by utilising networks. By using the dialectical policy networks analysis, the study indicates the importance of networks in overcoming socio, economic and political barriers to formulation process. Lesson learned from West Java Provincial Government echoes that policy networks include multiple actors and utilise resources from a range of stakeholders involved in the policy making. As network is involved in policy making process, thus the government is not just the dominant actor who take in charge in the policy process, it requires the other governments and non-governmental institutions, private sectors as well as public participations.

**Keywords**—policy networks, dialectical, governance, multiple actors, pandemic Covid-19

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the practice of good governance in a democratic country like in Indonesia, public policy making process is an important factor because there are more and more actors involved in the processes of formulation of policies. Particularly, in the pandemic Covid-19 situation where the government resources are hindered by huge amount of budget located to cure the spread of the disease, the government is no longer the only actor that determines the public policy process because the government should always be in collaboration with the other relevant stakeholders such as, private business and civil society organizations. As stated by Börzel, that the current government depends on cooperation and joined mobilization of resources with various actors outside the hierarchical control [1].

By using the conceptual frameworks of policy network, particularly the dialectical model proposed by Marsh and

Smith, this paper explores the usefulness of the networks in the collaborative actions taken by the West Java Governor in tackling the Covid-19 [2]. The practicality of how the West Java Provincial Government tackles the Covid-19 by involving other stakeholder is relevant example of how networking is essential in the pandemic situation.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Sandström and Carlsson state that policy networks can be described as organized entities consisting of actors and cooperative relationships among those who are involved in relatively joint activities in order to solve problems together [3]. This definition is based on the idea that the policy formulation process reflects the organizing process that occurs in a network of joint activities taken by groups to achieve their desired goals [4].

Marsh and Smith [2] explain that the dialectical relationship is an interactive relationship between 2 variables, each of which affects each other and is influenced repeatedly and continuously. For example, policy actors will bring strategic knowledge into network structures and network structures to shape actors' actions. They suggest that the reciprocal relationship between networks and policy outcomes is not easy or one-dimensional [2]. As explained by Marsh and Smith [2], there are 3 interactive or dialectical relationships between the network structure and the agents within it, the network and the context of the policy environment as well as the network and policy outcomes.

Marsh and Smith [2] assert that within the network there are institutionalization of values, beliefs, culture, and specific forms of behavior. Networks is an organization that shapes attitudes and behavior. Networks define the rules and roles they play. In networks, there are strong cultural dimensions such as a shared vision, a shared culture that surrounds its members. Networks play a role in determining the agenda setting, categorizing who is a member and who is not. Networks is an organization that is an accumulation of previous policies and their results [2].

Marsh and Smith [2] clarify that there are 3 important points that explain the role of agents or actors in policy networks, namely, first, actors in policy networks have a conflict of interest because they may also be part of other public policy networks. Agents in policy networks rely on agents to act themselves, and third, network members have expertise that shapes their capacity to seize opportunities in negotiation. Marsh and Smith [2] acknowledge that the structure of the policy context will influence agents to act as well as actor actions will affect the network structure, policy outcomes, and the policy context. They explain that the network structure and the resources owned are not permanent, because agents in the policy network will have intensive dialogue, argue and even change the structure of the policy network [2].

However, Marsh and Smith [2] realize that the network structure in the policy network and the resources owned by actors is not permanent, it could be that the actors involved have disagreements, argue, exercise bargaining positions, and even break away from the network. Which they form. Thus, the actors can negotiate about the network structure they form. Therefore, agents play a very important role in determining the outcome of the policy. In addition, the context can also affect the part of the network that is formed which can function and influence the interests and actions of the members in the network.

Marsh and Smith [2] explained that the network structure can reflect exogenous factors such as gender and ethnicity that are owned by members of the policy network. In addition, changes in network structure and policy outcomes can be influenced by the policy context, which is an exogenous factor. Likewise, exogenous factors can influence changes in policy networks and policy outcomes. External changes can also affect the resources and interests of actors in policy networks, network structures, network interactions and policy outcomes.

In a political context, for example, ministerial policies within a ministry can affect changes in network structure because ministers have the authority to form or change political policies in their respective fields. Likewise, the factors of technological innovation, economic recession, and ideological changes will affect the existence of policy networks.

Exogenous factors can cause changes in policy networks and will even have an effect on changes in policies, thus giving rise to new policies. However, the changes that come from exogenous factors do not directly change the network structure and policy outcome but depend on the interpretation of the actors in the policy network [2].

Marsh and Smith [2] state that other policy networks that are outside the context of a policy can also influence each other. Exogenous factors (external factors) can affect the resources owned, the interests of the actors and the relationship between them in the policy network. Changes in the external environment can create conflicts that lead to network breakdowns or lead to new policies. However, Marsh and Smith [2] suggest that exogenous factors do not directly affect

the network structure and interactions between them but are mediated through the understanding of the agents and interpreted by agents in the context of the network structure, norms/rules of the game in the intrapersonal relationship between them in policy network.

Toke and Marsh discuss that there is no direct relationship between networks and policy outcomes [5]. However, policy outcomes may affect the policy network in at least 3 ways, namely:

- The outcome of the policy or the policy outcome may influence changes in the members of the policy network or will balance the resources that are in it.
- Policy outcomes may affect the broader social structure which may weaken the position of interests of members in the policy network.
- Policy outcomes will influence actors because actors learn through experience. If the actors cannot provide benefits to other actors in their policy network or seek other strategies and actions that will benefit the agents in the existing policy network structure.

In explaining the reciprocal relationship between variables, Marsh and Smith [2] emphasized the important points of the dialectical/interactive relationship as follows:

- The context of the policy environment will influence both the network structure and the resources owned by members in the network.
- The ability of actors to negotiate or bargain is the result of their internal talents / abilities and the learning process they get in their interactions in the policy network.
- Interactions in policy networks and bargaining positions reflect the combination of resources owned by actors, capacities of actors, network structures and policy interactions.
- Network structure is a reflection of the structure of the policy environment context, the resources owned by actors, network interactions and policy outcomes.
- The policy outcome reflects the interaction between network structures and the interaction between policy networks.

Even though the model initiated by Marsh and Smith [2] is very popular among public policy observers, especially policy network theory. However, there are several network policy experts who have criticized the weaknesses of the Dialectical Model that was discussed by Marsh and Smith [2], namely:

- Evans [6] in his writing on "Understanding Dialectical Model" criticizes the obscurity of the dialectical meaning initiated by Marsh and Smith [2] so that it often leads to misinterpretation and misperception of the terminology "Dialectical". Evans argues that the

dialectical model pays less attention to concepts, social production, totality, contradiction and praxis [6].

- Dowding [7] and Raab [8] also criticize that the dialectical model does not emphasize process analysis and that some of the arrow paths in the dialectical model diagram are not clear and even disappear so that it cannot provide a clear causal picture of the variables analyzed by Marsh and Smith [2].

Although the Marsh and Smith's [2] model seems somewhat problematic and is not sufficient to explain the interrelationship between outcomes and network structures against the dialectical model it can be used in public policy network analysis as a conceptual framework to analyze how networks can influence public policy making process [5,9].

### III. METHODS

This paper uses qualitative method by undertaking library research and also literature review. Secondary data sources were drawn mainly from online publication through media, websites and government' reports. Analysis is conducted through applying the concept of policy network to the way the West java Government involves the other stakeholder outside the government in handling the spread of the pandemic Covid-19.

#### IV. COLLABORATION: LESSON LEARNED FROM WEST JAVA PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

In dealing with the pandemic COVID 19, the West Java Provincial Government does not only rely on its spending to the provincial Government budget and national budget but also it draws budget from five other sources: Public Private Partnership Budget, Regional Bonds, Banking Funds, Public Funds and Corporate Social Responsibility Budget [10]. The governments have promoted what they called collaborative action through *pentahelix* which involves variety of different stakeholders namely: the government, communities, private sectors, universities, and media. Firstly, one of the activities in realizing *pentahelix* is Corporate Social Responsibility forum or CSR Forum. Recently the number of companies that joined the CSR are 235 corporations, including 9 Regionally Owned Enterprises, 49 State-Owned Enterprise, and 177 private companies. The budget allocation until December 2020 has reached IDR 35, 37 billion. 44, 5 % of the fund has been distributed to handle Covid-19, 23,4 % of the budget has been allocated to social activities, education (10.9 %), health (3,2 percent) religious activities and infrastructure (4,5 %). Secondly is collaboration with other universities, especially in making innovation of Vent-I. The Indonesian Ventilator (Vent-I) which is the result of the collaboration of creative teams from Bandung Institute of Technology or Institute Teknologi Bandung (ITB), Unpad, YPM Salman ITB, and PT DI. Vent-I is a breath aid for COVID-19 patients that can be carried around practically. This portable ventilator uses the Positive End-Expiratory Pressure (PEEP) system which is relatively easy for doctors and nurses to operate.

Thirdly, the West Java Provincial Government is also working together to promote Si CePAD made by Padjadjaran University (*Universitas Padjajaran* or *Unpad*). The CePAD is a very practical and inexpensive rapid antigen test tool. Governor Ridwan Kamil even called the CePAD detection tool a Rapid Test 2.0. The governor hopes that CePAD can immediately pass the validation stage so that it can be further developed to mass production. Fourthly, in order to help people who have not been touched by social assistance, West Java Province initiated the *Nasi Bungkus* (rice packaging) Movement. The movement, which began on May 16, 2020, activated in 27 [7] districts / cities to build public kitchens. Packaged rice is distributed free of charge - just as much as possible as not to cause a crowd. Fifthly, is the activity of changing people's behavior to obey wearing masks - maintaining distance - washing hands with soap, is not an easy job. The government alone is not enough; it needs "insiders" in society to play their role. For this reason, on 19 October 2020, as many as 3,000 volunteers from various backgrounds were trained simultaneously for socialization and community education.

These collaboration efforts initiated and conducted by the Provincial Government are examples to enlarge, involve and build networks across different stakeholders. Although the government acts as a driving force in triggering the involvement of the other stakeholders but the position of the government is not a dominant actor. Instead, the government acts as a catalyst, or even as facilitator in giving space to the other stakeholder to participate in dealing with the pandemic Covid-19. The West Java Provincial Government has awarded that the other stakeholders involved are important elements in making the success in tackling the pandemic. Even the government has given reward them as their great contribution through the government award mechanism as the Deputy Governor of West Java say that: "Hopefully, this activity will trigger other companies, which can get more awards for their CSR and the greater their efforts. This award is a motivation that CSR is channeled to the community in a transparent and on target," said Kang Uu [11]. The government has also ensured the transparency and trust by establishing public services transparency through the website <http://csr.jabarprov.go.id>. Through this website the companies which collaborate with the government are able to access information and public accountability of the program.

### V. CONCLUSION

Marsh and Smith's [2] work on the dialectical model in policy network or policy networks has shed new light on public policy concepts. The dialectical model is an analytical instrument that can be used by observers of public policy (public policy) in analyzing the phenomena that occur in the era of good governance in which multi-level actors can be involved in the public policy process.

Evans [6] argues that the dialectical model has combined macro level systems such as political systems, economic systems, social and cultural systems, meso systems such as policy networks and micro-level systems such as individual

actor attitudes and behaviors so that they can generate multi-level, interactive network theory. Policy in the academic discipline of public policy. Evans [6] asserts that in the dialectical model, the policy outcome / policy outcome is the dependent variable and policy networks are the independent variable. Likewise, the micro level, meso level, macro level and public policy influence and are influenced one another.

The pentahelix model promoted by the West Java Provincial Government in handling the COVID-19 provides useful lesson learned of how important networking in tackling the community socio-economic burdens. This is one example of policy making is not dominated by the government, but this has involved a range of the other stakeholders who collaborate each other in friendly environment. Every stakeholder involved in public policy has been treated equal with the government. Even they are prized with award from the government to appreciate their great contribution to the community in handling the pandemic Covid-19.

This networking has proved that in the pandemic situation where the government spending hindered by limited resources available, the government can involve the other agencies along with the government to make better public policy making process.

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