

# Dear Mr. Mayor... Can You Clean the Housing?

## *A Citizen's Dependency on Local Government in Environmental Collective Action*

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**Abstract**—This article explains inequality relationship between local government and society in Muaro Lasak in managing environmental problem which is indicated by society's tendency to hand over environmental affairs to local government. By involving society members, visitors, and apparatus from local government institutions in interview, the research finds that the inequality relationship due to the weakening of public values among the society members who are positioned as the development object, as well as experienced by local government as the initiator of the program. The upstream of the problem is the lack of knowledge on each side.

**Keywords:** *public; publicness; knowledge; collaborative*

### I. INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on inequality relationship between society and local government in collaborative action in resolving environmental problem reviewed from publicness concept. This research empirically is based on community dependency to local authority to clean up the dwelling. Revitalization of Padang Beach as a leading tourist destination in city center implemented by the Mayor has leveraging tourism sector that also gives impact in community's economy. Unfortunately, this positive impact does not reach residential people who live opposite the beach. The residential area even becomes a paradox of beach exoticism since it is categorized as the slum and unkempt area.

Environmental issue has becoming usual study in collective action framework, such as those related to water resources [2], forest management [17], dwelling place [13] besides crisis management problem [1]. Within a smaller scope, this study probes cleanliness of housing environment. Although fairly simple, environmental hygiene issue has become a scourge for urban areas in developing countries since it affects local economic activity.

Collective action research in public administration has related to certain issues, e.g.: public-private partnership, join-up, networking, shared-common, and civic engagement. The analytical unit is stretched from the institutional level through

the topic of collaborative governance [9] or multi-organizational arrangements [22] to community level with community participation and resource sharing schemes [13]; [6]. Democratic deliberative atmosphere promises citizen engagement through responsive and publicly oriented collaborative governance. Yet, collective action practices do not run even in the community with the strong bonds of kinship. Thus, local government has handling dominantly environmental issues that should be confronted through collective action. The following text describes environmental management pattern viewed from publicness perspective: the domain of the country or the community?

### II. RESEARCH METHOD

Data are collected using interview which involving two groups of informant: first group is society members including dwellers and visitors of Muaro Lasak. The dwellers mostly are tenants who sell foods, snacks, or toys near the beach, while the visitors come from different areas in and outside Padang. Second group consist of related local government institution: Head of Padang Barat Subdistrict, Local Disaster Management Agency, Local Department of Culture and Tourism, and Regional Development Planning Board.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The waning of the essence of "publicness" is not just a theoretical discourse which is caused by conceptual gap in public administration [20]. Haque [16] claims that the condition affects public administration practices. Mostly urban community in development countries interprets public concept as a terminology attached to the state. Public administration is an administration of public: wholly handled by the state. This, still becomes a main problem in implementing local development program.

#### A. The missing "public"

The publicness values of a development program initiated by government may appear as long as the centralization is accompanied by bureaucrat's effort inducing community

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participation. Regional development projects in New Delhi in 1930s and poverty alleviation program in US in 1960s used this scheme [7]. However, centralizing public affairs arrangement is often seen as a reflection of half-hearted autonomy. As an entity that is not absolutely autonomous [20] citizens are conditioned to accept government dominance as such Hegel said as effort to ensure the citizen's existence and welfare [10].

In the political context, the government interest is assumed as accumulated reflection of public interest. Thus, it could be understood that development projects in many development countries lead to what United Nation describes as politicized and bureaucracy condensed [19]. In this case, collective action is hard to achieve since the public values in development program which is essentially oriented to accessibility, equality and equity are defined solely by the government through series of legal products and regulation [15].

The willingness of government institution to change refers to the revitalization of public meaning. According to Stoker [7], government (politicians and bureaucrats) is able to mobilize community participation by changing preference and creating environment that give chance to collaboration to take part. Shifting centralized control function is a way of empowering communities to achieve outcomes by defining their choice on government program [23].

Meanwhile, the publicness spirit of society is eroded by economic pressure. From the point of coastal society's view whose livelihood is shifting from fisheries to trade, the object of publicness is the economic interest. This condition resembles a simplification of Pesch's idea [20] labeled as liberal economic theory, in which individuals as public are bound by aggregation of economic interest. In this case, the public space becomes the derivation of private space of individuals who have similar interest on economic [21].

Unfortunately, the public space derived from the same economic interest cannot be elaborate as a community participation tool. Community from relatively homogeny members with similar cultural background should be easy to empowered because of shared-meaning pattern. Their cultural values may contribute to public practices since it contains meaningful lesson-learned [4] which is not accommodated by the positivist science approach.

With a character of transitional society in Muaro Lasak community, the Minangkabau kinship pattern has been shifted toward to a modernity that promotes individualism. Niniak mamak, indeed, holds a role to educate either nuclear or extended family in his clan. Information, knowledge, and experience he has gained was disseminating to his clan members through such formal and informal mechanisms like clan gathering or home-to-home visits. Nowadays, these roles are taken by nuclear family, yet it is unable to fill the gaps leaving by niniak mamak and the clan.

Conversely, the modernity character of transitional society has just partially adopted by Muaro Lasak society. The

existence of formal institution, such as in subdistrict level, has not yet functioned optimally, whereas informal organizations lose their meaning; left mere symbols. Bent [3] argues the old tradition is being abandoned since it incapable of meeting contemporary society's needs of socio economic development, while new rules and institutions has not been fully accepted due to its incompatibility implementation.

The weakening of publicness sense within the community might be caused by unprotected of citizens' social right [18] and lack of knowledge pertaining to public interest and values itself. This condition may appears due to limited individual capacity as describes by Olson [9], as worsen as bureaucratic practices as explains by Strives [21]. The government prefer to interpret collective action using the formal document rather than directly sharing framework to society.

In a community where the social right is maintained, the right of citizen to participate often be assured. Social right is not only related to economic equity, but also mainly emphasis on the concrete substance of civilized living [18]. Status equality leads citizen to voluntary contribute to decision making process and policy formulation since their roles are guaranteed by the state.

Related to neither the citizen limited capability nor lack of bureaucratic practices which are publicly oriented, authors argue those are resulted as lack of knowledge acquisition both on government and citizen sides, that elaborates in this next sub-chapter.

#### *B. Lack of Knowledge Capacity*

The gap between local government and society in handling environmental issues may be a form of knowledge lack. On the one side, society is not well-informed about the development program initiated by the local government while on the other hand the society do not have a comprehensive understanding related to the essence of citizenship inherent in each person.

Information has become the capital to participate in development process. Information is accumulated into knowledge which leads the owner to participate in policy formulation process guided by truth [11]. In this context, the meaning of truth refers to values of public interest. When citizen reluctant to participate in a policy formulation, albeit at the lowest level, it at least illustrates his/her perceptual and conceptual problem in analyzing public phenomena.

Dooyerweerd, as cited by Waldt [5], describes fifteen modalities that contribute to the formation of knowledge. Among the fifteen modalities, there are four capitals: social, economic, law and ethical in which the formation pertaining to the existence of state as a social structure. When those four capitals are well established by the state, they can contribute positively to the transdisciplinary capacity of citizen.

The lack of knowledge is not only about the capability gap of society, but also the government in absentia capturing community ideas then integrating them into institutional process and public policy [14]; [8]. The relevant institutions are unable to explore the endogenous capacity or adapt other

region successful practices onto local condition. In this case, Cooke [14] links knowledge term with technical, managerial, social, and cultural context. In addition, Henry [12] argues the acute limited knowledge suffered by government is also related to ecological disability. The failure of Tennessee Valley project in 1930s was a testament of government inability to deal with local ecology. American history even notes that the project can only resolved by Tennessee Valley residents themselves through community-oriented management.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The implementation scheme of environmental arrangement program in Muaro Lasak residential has not yet focused on revitalization of public values. There are local government's missing collaborative capacities: inability to recognize socio cultural and ecological characteristics of the society; and limited information disclosure. In line with that, citizens' ability to access public knowledge individually or communally also limited. Both are influencing community participation on development program particularly through top-down initiated.

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