

Research Article

Participatory Approaches in Improving the Quality of Public Services in Major Cities

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Abstract: This research aims to explore participatory approaches in improving the quality of public services in large Indonesian cities. In the context of rapid urbanization, the challenges in providing quality public services are increasingly complex. Therefore, a participatory approach is considered an effective solution for involving the community in the decision-making process and policy implementation. The research method used is literature review, by analyzing various sources, including journals, books and related research reports. The study results show that community participation can increase transparency, accountability and responsiveness in public services. In addition, community involvement in planning and evaluating public services can produce policies that are more relevant and in line with community needs. Several case studies in large Indonesian cities, such as Jakarta, Surabaya and Bandung, show that participatory initiatives, such as citizen forums and complaint applications, have succeeded in increasing public satisfaction with public services. However, challenges such as the community's lack of understanding of their rights and obligations, as well as bureaucratic obstacles still need to be overcome. This research recommends the need to increase the capacity of local governments in facilitating community participation and creating space for constructive dialogue. Thus. It is hoped that the participatory approach can be an effective strategy in improving the quality of public services in Indonesia's big cities.

Keywords: Big Cities; Community Participation; Indonesia; Participatory; Public Services.

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1. Introduction

Public service delivery constitutes one of the most important aspects of national development, particularly in an era characterized by accelerating globalization and urbanization. In Indonesia, where population growth continues to increase alongside rapid urbanization, major cities face significant challenges in providing high-quality public services (Drači & Laska, 2023). High-quality public services not only contribute to societal welfare but also serve as an important indicator in evaluating governmental performance (Magdalena et al., 2023). Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of public services have become increasingly crucial.

Major cities in Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung, function as centers of economic, social, and cultural activities. However, rapid urban growth is often not accompanied by adequate improvements in infrastructure and public service provision (Judijanto et al., 2024). Problems such as traffic congestion, environmental pollution, limited access to healthcare services, education, and other basic infrastructure have become pressing challenges for local governments. Within this context, participatory approaches to public service management have become increasingly relevant (Wirahayu & Mursyidah, 2023).

A participatory approach refers to the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes related to public policy. This concept is rooted in democratic principles, whereby citizens have the right to participate in determining the direction of development policies (Guragain, 2024). In the context of public service delivery, community participation can enhance government transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to public needs. By involving citizens, governments can obtain valuable input, better understand public needs and expectations, and formulate policies that are more relevant and effective (Mapuva, 2025). In Indonesia, despite various efforts to implement participatory approaches, substantial challenges remain. One of the primary challenges is the limited public understanding of citizens' rights and obligations within participatory processes. Many citizens perceive that they have little influence over decision-making processes, resulting in apathy toward public policies. Furthermore, bureaucratic barriers and the limited capacity of local governments to facilitate citizen participation also represent significant constraints (Moreno et al., 2024).

In recent years, various initiatives have been introduced to encourage community participation in public service delivery. For example, several local governments have developed public complaint applications that enable citizens to directly submit complaints and suggestions (Fu et al., 2024). In addition, citizen forums have been organized to discuss important issues related to public services. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives still requires further evaluation. Considering the importance of participatory approaches in improving public service quality, this study aims to explore various aspects related to the implementation of such approaches in major Indonesian cities. By employing a literature review method, this research analyzes relevant sources to understand how citizen participation can be integrated into public service management, as well as to identify existing challenges and opportunities (Bewinda et al., 2024).

Within this context, the study discusses several key issues. First, it explains the concept of public services and the importance of public service quality in the development process. Second, it examines participatory approaches, including their definitions, principles, and benefits. Third, the study identifies challenges associated with implementing participatory approaches in Indonesia and provides recommendations for enhancing citizen participation in public service delivery. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute meaningfully to efforts aimed at improving the quality of public services in major Indonesian cities through participatory approaches. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this research will serve as a reference for local governments, academics, and communities in understanding the importance of collaboration between government institutions and citizens in creating public services that are more effective and responsive to societal needs (Yadav, 2024).

2. Literature Review

This study employs a literature review method to explore participatory approaches in improving the quality of public services in major Indonesian cities. This method was selected because it enables researchers to collect and analyze various relevant sources of information, including academic journals, books, research reports, and policy documents related to the subject under investigation. The research process began with the identification and collection of literature sources concerning community participation in public service delivery at both the local and national levels. Subsequently, an analysis was conducted to identify patterns, challenges, and best practices emerging from various participatory initiatives implemented in major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung. The data obtained were then analyzed qualitatively to understand the impact of participatory approaches on the quality of public service delivery. This study also considers the social, economic, and political contexts that influence the implementation of community participation. The findings of this literature review are expected to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of participatory approaches and offer recommendations for enhancing community engagement in public service delivery in Indonesia.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the literature review indicate that participatory approaches in public service delivery within major Indonesian cities have generated positive impacts on improving service quality. Various initiatives, such as public complaint applications and citizen forums, have successfully enhanced community involvement in decision-making processes. However, challenges remain, including limited public understanding of participatory rights and bureaucratic barriers that hinder the participation process (Dwitasari, 2024). The study also

found that marginalized groups are often excluded from participatory processes, resulting in policies that do not always reflect the needs of all segments of society. The importance of transparency and accountability in decision-making is also emphasized, as these principles can strengthen public trust in government institutions. By enhancing the capacity of local governments to facilitate participation and by providing adequate education and information to the public, the quality of public service delivery is expected to continue improving. A participatory approach is not merely a method; rather, it represents a strategic step toward more inclusive and responsive governance (Masse & Ilyas, 2024).

Case Study: Participatory Approaches in Improving the Quality of Public Service Delivery in Major Indonesian Cities

Major cities in Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung, face significant challenges in providing high-quality public services. Rapid urbanization, population growth, and the complexity of socio-economic issues require governments to seek innovative and effective solutions. One approach that has gained increasing prominence is the participatory approach, in which citizens are actively involved in decision-making processes related to public service delivery. This case study explores the implementation of participatory approaches in three major Indonesian cities—Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung—and examines their impact on the quality of public service delivery.

Jakarta: The Qlue Application and Community Participation

Jakarta, as the capital city of Indonesia, is one of the most highly urbanized cities in the country. Issues such as traffic congestion, pollution, and inadequate infrastructure constitute major challenges. To address these issues, the Provincial Government of DKI Jakarta launched the “Qlue” application in 2015. This application was designed to facilitate community participation in monitoring and reporting problems within their neighborhoods. The Qlue application enables citizens to report various issues, such as waste management problems, damaged roads, and unsatisfactory public services (Fitrianita, 2024). Every report submitted through the platform is forwarded to the relevant government agency for follow-up action. In addition, the application provides information regarding government policies and ongoing public programs.

Since its launch, Qlue has received thousands of reports from the public. Data indicate that the government's responsiveness to citizen reports has improved significantly. According to official reports, more than 70% of submitted reports were addressed within 24 hours. This demonstrates that community participation through the application has enhanced governmental accountability and responsiveness. Nevertheless, challenges remain. Although the application has successfully increased public participation, not all segments of society have equal access to technology. Marginalized groups, particularly those living in peripheral areas, are often unable to utilize the application effectively. Therefore, efforts are required to ensure that all citizens, especially marginalized communities, can actively participate in the participatory process (Idrus et al., 2024).

Surabaya: Citizen Forums and Community Engagement

Surabaya, as the second-largest city in Indonesia, also faces challenges in providing high-quality public services. In order to enhance community participation, the Surabaya Municipal Government regularly organizes citizen forums. These forums aim to discuss key issues encountered by the community and to provide opportunities for residents to express their opinions (Jung & Kang, 2023). Citizen forums in Surabaya are held on a monthly basis and involve various elements of society, including community leaders, non-governmental organizations, and government representatives. In these forums, citizens are able to raise questions, provide input, and submit complaints related to public services. The outcomes of these forums are subsequently used as a basis for policy-making and decision-making by the government (Alifa et al., 2023). The citizen forums have succeeded in creating a constructive space for dialogue between the government and the public. Data indicate that public participation in these forums has increased year by year. In 2022, more than 1,000 citizens participated in each forum, and many of them reported that their voices were heard and taken into account by the government. Another positive impact is the improvement in public satisfaction with public services. A survey conducted by the municipal government shows that the level of public satisfaction with public services increased by 20% following the implementation of the citizen forums. However, the main challenge lies in ensuring that these forums remain inclusive and accessible to all segments of society, including marginalized groups (Kohli, 2024).

Bandung: Bandung Smart City Program

Bandung, a city known for its innovation and creativity, has developed the “Bandung Smart City” program to improve the quality of public services. This program integrates information and communication technology into public service delivery and encourages public participation. One of the initiatives under this program is the development of the “Bandung Smart City” application, which enables citizens to access information on public services, report issues, and provide feedback. The application also includes a public consultation feature, allowing citizens to express their views on policies currently being formulated by the municipal government. Since the launch of the Bandung Smart City program, there has been a significant increase in public participation. The application has been downloaded by more than 100,000 users, and thousands of reports and suggestions from citizens are received each month. Data indicate that more than 80% of submitted reports are followed up by the government within a relatively short period of time. This demonstrates that technology can serve as an effective tool for transparency and accountability in public service delivery. In addition, the program has also succeeded in increasing public awareness of the importance of participation in decision-making processes. A survey conducted by the municipal government shows that 75% of respondents feel more engaged in governance processes following the implementation of this program. However, the main challenge lies in ensuring that all citizens, particularly those without access to technology, are still able to participate. Therefore, the government needs to develop strategies to reach these groups, such as through face-to-face events and community-based outreach activities (Imran et al., 2023).

Comparative Analysis

Based on the three case studies above, several similarities and differences can be identified in the implementation of participatory approaches across the cities.

Similarities

- a. **Public Engagement:** All three cities demonstrate that public participation in decision-making processes can improve the quality of public services. Whether through digital applications, citizen forums, or smart city programs, public participation is a key element in creating more responsive policies.
- b. **Use of Technology:** The use of information technology has become an effective tool for enhancing public participation. Applications such as Qlue and Bandung Smart City illustrate how technology can facilitate communication between the government and citizens.
- c. **Inclusion Challenges:** All three cities also face similar challenges regarding inclusivity. Communities in peripheral areas and marginalized groups often do not have equal access to participate, highlighting the need for targeted efforts to engage them.

Differences

- a. **Methods of Participation:** Jakarta primarily focuses on the use of digital applications for reporting public issues, whereas Surabaya emphasizes citizen forums as a medium for dialogue. Bandung integrates technology with a broader participatory approach through its smart city program.
- b. **Level of Responsiveness:** Although all three cities demonstrate improved responsiveness, Jakarta, through the Qlue application, records faster response times compared to Surabaya’s citizen forums. This may be attributed to the nature of digital applications, which enable direct and real-time reporting.
- c. **Public Satisfaction:** Surabaya shows a significant increase in public satisfaction following the implementation of citizen forums, while Bandung reports higher public awareness regarding the importance of participation. This indicates that different methods may produce different types of impacts.

Recommendations for Enhancing Public Participation

Based on the analysis of the three case studies, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance public participation in public service delivery:

- a. **Improving Access to Technology**

The government needs to ensure that all segments of society have equal access to technology. This can be achieved by providing public facilities such as free Wi-Fi in public areas and offering training on the use of digital tools for individuals who are less familiar with technology.

b. Building Community Networks

The government may establish community networks involving civil society organizations, community leaders, and youth groups to reach marginalized populations. Through such collaboration, information regarding participatory initiatives can be disseminated more effectively.

c. Conducting Outreach Activities

The implementation of outreach programs and public dialogue at the community level can help increase public awareness of their rights and responsibilities in participatory processes. These activities can also serve as a platform for directly listening to citizens' aspirations.

d. Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms

The government should conduct regular evaluations of participatory initiatives that have been implemented. Public feedback is essential for assessing program effectiveness and making necessary improvements.

6. Conclusion

Participatory approaches in public service delivery in major Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung have significant potential to enhance service quality and public engagement. Through various implemented initiatives, including the Qlue application in Jakarta, citizen forums in Surabaya, and the Bandung Smart City program, it is evident that public participation contributes to improved governmental responsiveness and accountability.

The Qlue application, for instance, has successfully facilitated direct public reporting of issues, enabling the government to respond quickly and effectively. This demonstrates that technology can serve as a highly useful instrument in improving communication between the government and citizens, as well as in fostering transparency in public service management. In contrast, citizen forums in Surabaya have created a constructive space for dialogue between the government and the public. Through these forums, citizens are provided with opportunities to express their opinions, complaints, and suggestions regarding public services. The outcomes of these forums are frequently used as a basis for policy-making decisions by the government, indicating that citizens' voices are taken into account in the process. The increase in public satisfaction with public services in Surabaya following the implementation of citizen forums serves as evidence that public engagement can generate policies that are more relevant and responsive to societal needs.

The Bandung Smart City program also demonstrates how the integration of information technology can encourage public participation. By providing an application that enables citizens to access information and submit feedback, the Bandung municipal government has succeeded in increasing public awareness of the importance of participation in decision-making processes. Data indicate that many residents feel more involved in governance processes following the implementation of this program, reflecting a positive transformation in the relationship between the government and society.

However, despite considerable progress, challenges in implementing participatory approaches remain. One of the main challenges is the limited access of marginalized groups and residents in peripheral areas to participate. This highlights the need for further efforts to ensure that all segments of society, including marginalized populations, have equal opportunities to engage in decision-making processes. Therefore, it is essential for the government to develop more inclusive strategies, such as organizing community-level outreach activities and public dialogues, as well as building community networks involving civil society organizations.

Recommendations for improving public participation in public service delivery include enhancing access to technology, strengthening community networks, and conducting regular evaluations of participatory initiatives. By improving access to technology, the government can ensure that all citizens, including disadvantaged groups, are able to utilize available tools for participation. In addition, building community networks involving various societal actors can help reach marginalized groups and ensure that their voices are heard. Overall, participatory approaches in public service delivery in major Indonesian cities demonstrate that collaboration between government and society can produce better and more responsive services.

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