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Reframing Community Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Place-Based Approach to Prodamas in Kediri, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to critique the community empowerment program (Prodamas) in Kediri City, Indonesia. Using Carol Bacchi's What's the Problem Represented to Be? (WPR) analytical framework, this study explores how the problem of community empowerment is represented in policy documents, as well as how these representations are produced, disseminated, and maintained. This study employs an interpretive qualitative method, utilizing data sources that include local government regulations, case study reports, and the results of semi-structured interviews with residents. The results shows that Prodamas portrays the community as a passive entity that requires motivation to participate, while structural dimensions such as social inequality, local power relations, and limited citizen capacity are not addressed in the policy. This representation produces discursive and institutional effects that strengthen bureaucratic dominance, reduce the meaning of empowerment to procedural activities, and limit citizen agency. This article makes a theoretical contribution by offering a critical analysis of community empowerment programs in the context of developing countries. This article also encourages a shift in the empowerment approach from mere administrative participation to the formation of a more equitable and reflective political space for citizens at the local level.

Keyword:

Community Empowerment,
Place-Based Approach, WPR
Approach, Policy Analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, a place-based approach has come to the fore in global discourse as a promising policy strategy to address inequalities in territorial and structural development

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(Beer, 2023; Fajgelbaum & Gaubert, 2025; Mccann, 2023; Moretti, 2024; Rothenberg & Temenggung, 2019; Solé-Ollé, 2023). This approach recognises that development challenges are deeply embedded in specific geographic, social, and institutional contexts, which cannot be effectively addressed through one-size-fits-all solutions. Traditional or sector-based policies often fail to address local needs, thereby exacerbating the disadvantages of historically marginalized regions. In contrast, the place-based approach emphasises the importance of designing contextual, promoting participatory interventions and placing local communities at the centre of planning and decision-making processes. (Barca, 2019). Therefore, the place-based approach is seen as a transformative strategy to empower communities and promote territorial and social justice simultaneously.

A place-based approach involves a combination of economic, infrastructure and social development strategies. However, Rong et al. (2023) highlight that community engagement is a vital aspect of the place-based approach. The place-based approach does not assume a single policy model for all, but instead relies on the local context —whether social, geographical, economic, or cultural—that is directly experienced by the community. Focusing on local actors and their needs, the place-based approach encourages strengthening community capacity by providing more expansive participation and enabling communities' agency in formulating and implementing policy. The place-based approach also creates a governance structure more open to citizen voices, facilitates collaborative networks, and encourages negotiations between communities and formal institutions, as it aligns with the goal of community empowerment (George & Reed, 2017; Klepac et al., 2023). This inclusiveness feature increases the legitimacy of policy decisions and improves their quality by incorporating a wider range of knowledge and experiences. This can also lead to the effectiveness and efficiency of the policy itself.

The history of community empowerment initiatives through a place-based development approach has undergone a long development (Stoney et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2017). From the 1960s to the early 1980s, global concern for community engagement in development increased rapidly in various countries, including through area-based development programs such as the Community Development Programs in the UK and the Neighbourhood Improvement Program in Canada. In the US, urban activists and theorists such as Jane Jacobs also strongly criticised modern city planning, which was detached from the social realities of local communities. However, with the onset of the neoliberal era in the 1980s, public policy began to shift towards physical regeneration and market mechanisms, resulting in a decline in citizen participation. The revival of community engagement emerged in the 1990s, mainly through partnerships between government and communities, although it was often driven more by the logic of funding competition than by citizen aspirations. Entering the 21st century, a number of countries such as Canada, Europe, and the United States have reaffirmed the importance of citizen involvement in regional planning, especially at the neighbourhood level. In the Canadian context, for example, the federal government emphasises the importance of social infrastructure as a support for physical development and social welfare, while in 2005, Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) published their work with a title 'Place-based Public Policy: Towards a New Urban and Community Agenda for Canada.'

In Indonesia, community empowerment through a place-based approach can be traced to the Kampung Improvement Programs in the 1970s-1980s. The initiatives reappeared in the Indonesian reform era, when decentralisation policies provided space for governments to design interventions based on local needs. Programs such as the National Community Empowerment Program (PNPM) that ran between 2007 and 2014 demonstrated important

elements of this approach by providing direct funds to villages and facilitating community deliberations as a planning process. The program is considered a milestone in shifting the development control centre to the community level. At the city level, similar approaches have been developed in policy initiatives such as *Kampung Tematik* in Surabaya city and the Community Empowerment Program (Prodamas) in Kediri City.

Prodamas was launched in 2015. The program promises a change in development patterns from top-down to a more participatory, contextual process that empowers residents. Prodamas was designed by allocating a development budget based on Neighbourhood Associations (Rukun Tetangga/ RT). In the early period of this program, the amount of funds allocated for each RT was IDR 50 million per year. The funds were allocated for infrastructure development activities by 60%, and socio-economic activities by 40%. The number of RT registered and able to access Prodamas was around 1,478 RT spread across 46 sub-districts. In the following period, Prodamas expanded its scope and budget allocation and changed its name to Prodamas Plus with a budget allocation of IDR 100 million per RT per year. Prodamas is implemented with a particular management mechanism in the sub-district office work unit. Formally, Prodamas is claimed to be a form of implementation of the principle of empowerment by providing positions and community participation in planning, implementation, and monitoring. The program is designed based on local needs and provides residents with the opportunity to manage their budgets through local community groups (*Kelompok Masyarakat/Pokmas*). It is not surprising that in various government publications and media coverage (see, for instance, Astuti, 2021; Duta, 2019; Dwi, 2023; Tugu, 2023). Prodamas is often described as one of the “best practices” of community-based development in Indonesia.

However, claims regarding Prodamas' success in empowering communities require critical examination. Interpretive policy thinkers (such as Fischer, 2003; Hajer, 2003) remind that every public policy not only contains solutions to a particular problem but also implicitly conveys how a “problem” is constructed, who is considered the leading actor or beneficiary, and what values are considered important in the policy. In other words, policies are not neutral reflections of reality, but rather the result of complex discursive processes in which power, representation, and identity play a significant role in shaping the meaning of policies. In this context, the term ‘community empowerment’ in Prodamas documents and public discourse cannot be understood simply as an objective condition that can be measured or evaluated. Instead, the term of empowerment is a socially and politically constructed concept open to question. Taking these questions as a starting point, this article uses an interpretive approach to critically read Prodamas' policies (Browne et al., 2019). This approach does not aim to evaluate the program's effectiveness from a technical or administrative perspective, but rather to uncover how this policy constructs the meaning of empowerment, who benefits or is excluded in the process, and what the socio-political consequences of this construction are for the citizens of Kediri.

Criticism of the place-based approach to empowerment practices in the context of development policy is not a new phenomenon. Previous studies have shown that the state and dominant actors often use the rhetoric of empowerment to legitimise control over society in subtle ways (see, for instance, Li, 2007). The practice of village deliberations or community forums is often questioned regarding who is present, who speaks, and to what extent the voices of marginalised groups (women, people with low incomes, people with disabilities) are heard. In this case, Prodamas, as a community empowerment policy, also risks reproducing the same power relations if it is not accompanied by critical reflection on how the program is constructed and implemented. For example, the Prodamas policy document mentions

participation as a fundamental principle, but does not always explain how participation is defined and measured qualitatively. Is it enough to attend meetings? The representation of the community that “must be empowered” also raises questions. Who is meant by the community? Does Prodamas create an equal deliberative space or strengthen an unequal social structure? These questions show that policy studies cannot be conducted only with a technocratic approach. An interpretive approach is necessary to read policy as a field of discourse (Fischer, 2003; Laws & Rein, 2003), a space where the meanings of development, empowerment, and participation are contested.

This study uses “Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to Be?” (WPR) developed by Carol Bacchi (2009) as a framework, which is based on the assumption that every public policy contains a specific representation of the “problem” to be solved, and this representation contains certain assumptions, values, and exclusions that need to be critically examined. Using the WPR’s framework, this article aims to: 1) Explore how Prodamas policy represent the problem of community empowerment; 2) Identify the assumptions underlying the representation; 3) Explore what is not a problem (silences) in the policy; 4) Analyze the discursive effects of this policy representation. In doing so, this study not only provides conceptual contributions to community empowerment policy with a place-based approach but also offers critical reflections on the practice of policy analysis in the Indonesian context.

METHODS

This study uses an interpretive qualitative approach. In “A Guide to Policy Analysis as a research method”, Brown et al., (2019) explained that interpretive approaches examine the framing and representation of problems and how policies reflect the social construction of ‘problems’. The study used the WPR approach developed by Carol Bacchi (2009). This approach is used to understand how the term of community empowerment is framed and circulated in Prodamas. This study focuses on analysing policy problem representation and constructing policy meaning in official documents, public discourse, and government communication materials regarding the Community Empowerment Program (Prodamas) in Kediri City.

This study obtained data from policy documents such as mayoral regulations, Implementation guidelines, technical instructions, or SOPS related to the planning and implementation mechanisms of Prodamas, Government publications and media coverage. These sources were chosen because they textually contain discourse and narratives about community, empowerment, and development, which are the focus of analysis in this study. Selection based on textual relevance: only documents containing narratives about the empowerment, participation, citizen representation, or program achievements are retained as primary data. Primary data were obtained from interviews with three residents in three different sub-districts to gather their perspectives on the practices of Prodamas, which can vary between locations. This study also uses findings from previous studies as comparative data.

Data analysis was conducted thematically using Bacchi’s six questions (WPR) guide, with the following steps: 1) Identifying the representation of the problem in the policy text; 2) Exploring underlying assumptions; 3) Tracing the genealogy of discourse; 4) Identifying silences; 5) Analyzing discursive and subjective effects; 6) Exploring potential resistance or reframing. The analysis was conducted using manual thematic coding tools, but the primary focus remained on the depth of interpretation of meaning.

As an interpretive study, the researcher is aware of the role in reading the text and does not claim absolute neutrality. However, transparency in tracking the analysis process is

achieved by developing a systematic coding of documentation and interpretation. Validity issues are not measured through replication or generalisation, but rather through triangulation between sources: comparing representations in official documents, the narrative of government communication, interviews with residents, media coverage, and research findings from previous academic studies. The logical coherence between data, analysis, and argumentation can be examined by doing so.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Empowerment in the Place-Based Approach Framework

Community empowerment and a place-based approach are closely related as two important pillars in building social justice and sustainable development. Community empowerment refers to the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives (WHO, 2025). According to the WHO, empowerment refers to the process by which people gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives. George & Reed (2017) argue that community empowerment is an imperative in a place-based approach. They define community empowerment as a shift towards greater equality in the social relations of power. They argue that a place-based approach must seek mechanisms to empower multiple groups within a community, improve participation, develop local leadership, and increase community control and ownership of initiatives.

A place-based approach emphasises the importance of understanding local diversity and designing policies that are contextual, participatory, and adaptive to the specific conditions of a place (Klepac et al., 2023). Thus, this approach not only prioritises development efficiency but also encourages active citizen involvement in the planning and decision-making process. According to Barca et al., (2012) the success of place-based policies requires that local actors are galvanised to play a constructive and leading role in the policy. This involvement forms an important pathway to community empowerment, as it opens up space for communities to determine their priorities, voice their needs, and strengthen their collective capacity in managing local resources sustainably.

More than just a technocratic strategy, the place-based approach acts as a transformative instrument in community empowerment. When policies are designed with local communities as equal partners, not just beneficiaries, the development process also becomes a means of distributing power, strengthening agency, and establishing more inclusive governance (Ansell & Torfing, 2021)(Ansell et al., 2021). This approach allows for the emergence of forms of social innovation and cross-actor collaboration based on local trust and solidarity (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019). In this context, empowerment is not just the outcome of a development program, but rather becomes a fundamental principle guiding the design and implementation of policies.

Reframing Community Empowerment on Prodamas

The Representation of the Problem in Prodamas Policy

According to the official documents of the Kediri City Government's policies on implementing Prodamas and Prodamas Plus, the main problems identified are the low level of community participation and the inadequate management of local potential in micro-scale development. This representation is stated in several key articles. For example, Article 2 paragraph (1) and (2) of Kediri Mayor Regulation Number 40 of 2014 states that Prodamas aims to "increase the participation and mobilisation of the potential of the sub-district (*Kelurahan*) community", as well as "mobilise and motivate the community to participate actively", and "facilitate the community in articulating their needs and helping to identify

their problems." This policy frames residents as development actors who are not yet active enough and need to be mobilised by the state through facilitation. This narrative is continued and strengthened in Kediri Mayor Regulation Number 3 of 2019. Article 2, paragraph (1) reiterates that the purpose of Prodamas Plus is "to increase further the participation and mobilisation of the potential of the sub-district (*Kelurahan*) community". Meanwhile, paragraph (2) lists policy objectives that include the development of infrastructure, as well as improvements in economic, social, educational, health, and youth welfare, all of which are placed within the framework of increasing the capacity and contribution of residents to the development of their region. The phrase "further increasing participation" implies that previous participation was deemed insufficient.

The narrative on this issue is elaborated in Kediri Mayor Regulation Number 3 of 2023, which refers to Prodamas Plus as a "continued community empowerment program" that not only encourages participation, but also "develops various local potentials and addresses priority problems" by utilising own resources or collaboration between parties (Article 1 number 9). Here, citizen participation and independence remain the axis, emphasising stakeholder synergy. However, this representation is questionable when compared to the reality of implementation in several places. A case study in Dandangan Sub-district shows that although citizen participation is visible in the implementation of activities, many residents at the RT level still do not fully understand the limitations and mechanisms of Prodamas. (Nikmah, 2018a). This is due to the lack of socialisation and the limited capacity of assistants in the *Kelurahan*.

Likewise, in Ngampel Sub-district, the process of citizen proposals is not directed by budget policy, which favours physical development. A study of one RT in Ngampel Sub-district stated that most budget proposals were used to fulfil infrastructure, even though the health sector received the most significant portion of the budget in the policy. (Ussyifa, 2023). In interviews with residents, a narrative emerged that residents thought that the problem the government wanted to solve through Prodamas was the problem of environmental cleanliness. A similar narrative also emerged in Bujel Sub-district, where residents felt that activities such as procuring tents or paving were helpful, but were not directed at strengthening capacity or business opportunities (Irameimuna & T. Tauran, 2016). Thus, if formulated briefly, the Prodamas and Prodamas Plus policies represent local development problems as a "participation deficit" and "lack of articulation of needs by residents". The solutions offered are in the form of strengthening the deliberation mechanism, facilitating proposals from RT, and delegating the implementation of activities to Pokmas through a self-management scheme. Bacchi's framework suggests that policies have framed the problem as stemming from the weakness of citizen initiative, rather than from structural constraints such as capacity imbalances between neighbourhood units, bureaucratic dominance, or the exclusion of marginalised groups. Citizens are positioned as passive agents who need to be motivated and directed, while the structures that limit their agency are not examined as part of the problem.

Assumptions Underlying the Representation

The representation that Kediri residents are less participatory and have not been able to articulate development needs independently is based on several normative and technocratic assumptions that are not critically examined in policy. These assumptions are reproduced in regulatory articles and reinforced by implementation practices in the field, which are evident in case studies and citizen interviews. First, there is an assumption that community participation can be formed technocratically through procedural mechanisms,

such as citizen deliberations. This is reflected in policy structures such as Articles 5 and 6 of Perwali No. 40 of 2014, where citizen deliberations are used as the starting point for activity proposals, with their implementation entrusted to implementing community groups (Pokmas). The second assumption is that all RT have equal social and administrative capacity to prepare proposals, hold deliberations, and manage the implementation of activities. Case studies in Tamanan Sub-district (Farhan, 2017) and Dandangan (Nikmah, 2018b) Show capacity gaps between RT, where RT with limited human resources have difficulty understanding the technicalities of proposals and compiling reports. This shows that the policy ignores internal disparities between regions as a factor that influences the effectiveness of participation.

The policy's third assumption is that society is homogeneous and, therefore, sufficiently involved in the formal RT structure without considering the diversity of needs of vulnerable groups. There are no explicit provisions in the regulations that guarantee the involvement of women, people with disabilities, or other marginalised groups in decision-making forums. This is emphasised in the findings of the study in Bujel Sub-district, which noted that the active participation of women still needs to be improved, so that special affirmation is needed. (Irameimuna & T. Tauran, 2016).

The fourth assumption is that empowerment will automatically be achieved by opening up space for participation and providing a budget. This is a form of instrumentalist understanding of empowerment, where state intervention in providing funds and forming groups is considered sufficient to change the socio-political position of residents. However, as mentioned in the Ngampel Sub-district study, although the six areas of Prodamas Plus activities have been fulfilled, the empowerment results have not been significant because the proposals are more focused on infrastructure rather than increasing the capacity of residents. Fifth, this policy is built on the assumption that the state (city and Sub-district governments) is a neutral facilitator, which will respond to the needs of residents fairly and professionally. In practice, residents experience the dominance of Sub-district officials and assistants in directing activities. An informant from one of the sub-districts said: that in community discussions, the RT head and the sub-district are the most dominant in determining the planning” (Interview, Informant 3)

Thus, the assumptions above collectively frame the empowerment problem as an internal problem of the community, namely related to awareness, capacity, or willingness to be involved. As a result, policies tend to avoid discussing the structural conditions that limit community agency, such as unequal access to information, limited education, power relations at the local level, and bureaucratic dominance in the implementation process. In Bacchi's framework, these assumptions shape how we view problems and set boundaries for what is considered worthy of being questioned and addressed.

The Genealogy of Representation

The representation that the community “has not participated enough” and that development must be “facilitated” by the city government through direct funds to the RT level did not emerge suddenly. This representation results from historical dynamics and local politics in Kediri, which can be traced to two main contexts. The first is the context of local politics: Prodamas as a campaign promise. In interviews, two informants mentioned that Prodamas was initially introduced as part of the campaign promises of the mayoral candidates. Informant 2: “Initially, Prodamas was the initial program of the mayoral candidate who wanted to create community-based development.” Informant C: “Introduced by the mayoral candidate as a flagship campaign program.” This indicates that Prodamas

was born from politicising the needs of residents. This initiative was promised to attract electoral support, especially by promising the allocation of development funds directly to the smallest community unit (RT). In this context, the representation of the problem was formed not merely because of technocratic evaluation, but as a political strategy to gain legitimacy and power.

Second, National Context: Strengthening Villages and Sub-districts through Direct Transfer Funds. The Prodamas policy emerged alongside the trend of fiscal decentralisation and the increasing push to strengthen the lowest level of government, either through Village Funds in rural areas or similar schemes in cities, such as sub-district funds. In many cities, including Kediri, the pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based programs is also related to demands from the central government and donors for measurable and participatory development performance indicators. The representation of the problem as “less participatory” fits the language of donors and the central government.

Third, Technocratization of Participation. The representation of the problem in Prodamas is also inseparable from the influence of participatory planning styles driven by technocracy, such as Musrenbang. Although it mentions “participation,” this process is often guided by hierarchical structures and predetermined procedural formats, as seen in the Prodamas planning mechanism from RT to city (Article 5 of Perwali 40/2014). This is a form of an invited space (Cornwall, 2008) Where citizens are invited to participate, but within a framework that the state has determined, interview data strengthens the indication that the formation of problem representations does not originate from residents’ direct experiences, but is a product of political and institutional interventions. When asked how Prodamas was introduced, Informant A stated: “Through kelurahan dissemination. By Kelurahan and RT administrators.” Informants B and C stated that Prodamas emerged in the context of a mayoral candidate campaign. Residents never initiated the formulation of problems or solutions autonomously, but rather entered into a previously established program structure. Problem representations were delivered top-down through socialisation, not the result of collective articulation from the bottom up.

The representation of problems in Prodamas was formed from a combination of electoral political needs, national policy designs that emphasise efficiency and measurement of participation, and technocratic logic in development governance. In this context, citizen participation is not seen as an inherent political right, but as a development strategy that needs to be managed. In other words, the representation that society is “not participatory enough” or “not yet able to take the initiative” is the result of historical construction by local political elites and national policies that want “fast, cheap, and measurable” development. This is not just an objective assessment of citizens' conditions, but rather a narrative that is formed and legitimised by the city government through public policy. As a result, this problem of representation locks citizens in a passive position and limits the space for alternative political articulation. While citizens' needs remain contextual and urgent (as mentioned by informants: cleanliness, security, necessities, etc.), the available participation mechanisms do not allow citizens to structurally re-arrange the development agenda. This representation of the problem perpetuates the state's power in determining the "problems" and "solutions" of development, instead of opening it up for negotiation and critical reflection.

What is Unproblematic in the Problem Representation in Prodamas Policy

The representation that the main problem of local development in Kediri is the lack of community participation and the weak articulation of community needs leaves several structural and political aspects unquestioned in the official policy framework. This

representation seems to cover factors significantly influencing community empowerment in the development process.

First, the policy does not question the inequality of capacity between RT and sub-districts. All RT are considered to have an equal starting point regarding knowledge, organisation, and access to resources. Field data shows significant disparities in capacity. In a study in Tamanan Sub-district, for example, it was stated that implementing activities depends on "coordination and understanding of community members regarding the flow of Prodamas activities." However, not all community members have sufficient access or capacity to understand these technical mechanisms equally.

Second, the policy does not question the power relations between community members, Pokmas, sub-district officials, and facilitators. The facilitation and verification functions emphasise administrative control rather than social learning. In some cases, Pokmas were formed without an inclusive election process. This shows that citizen involvement in deliberations is often procedural and controlled from above. However, this is not criticised by policy, as if all citizens have an equal and free voice in the deliberation forum.

Third, there is no critical reflection in policy on the bureaucratic structure that greatly determines the direction of activities and budget allocation. Kediri Mayor regulation No. 32 of 2021 and No. 3 of 2023 have a multi-layered division of roles, ranging from the City Control Team, Verification Team, to the Technical Guidance Team. Although designed to ensure accountability, in practice, this can hinder flexibility and responsiveness to the contextual needs of residents. This is reinforced in a study in Ngronggo Sub-district, which found that implementation was running "according to policy", but the expected changes had not yet been seen, and "the resources used needed development and adjustment" (Ainurroziqin & Susilo, 2024).

Fourth, the issue of social exclusion of vulnerable groups is ignored in policy. There are no affirmative clauses for women, people with disabilities, or poor groups in deliberation procedures or activity determination. A study in Bujel Sub-district found that: "The active participation of women needs to be increased (Irameimuna & T. Tauran, 2016). However, the policy does not provide structural tools to ensure this bias. This inequality is considered a technical problem, not a structural injustice. Overall, the representation of problems in the Prodamas policy simplifies local development issues into the issue of "lack of participation" and thus diverts attention from power relations, structural inequalities, and bureaucratic control, which determine the direction of development. As Bacchi emphasises, what is not questioned is often more important than what is represented, because it reveals the power structures behind the policy narrative.

Effects of Problem Representation in Prodamas Policy

The representation that the local development problem in Kediri is low citizen participation and weak articulation of needs. This situation produces various social and political effects that directly impact citizens, implementing actors, and the power relations structure at the Sub-district level. In Bacchi's framework, this representation reflects reality and shapes certain social realities through discursive and institutional effects.

1. **Subjectification Effect: Citizens as Objects to be Motivated.** Citizens are represented as passive entities that need to be moved by the state through training, deliberation, and facilitation. This can be seen in narratives such as "mobilising community potential" and "motivating the community to actively participate" in Article 2 of Perwal No. 40 of 2014. As a result, citizens are not treated as autonomous subjects who have political capacity, but as targets of administrative intervention. The effect of this perspective is

the formation of "ideal" citizens according to the policy, those who are obedient, administrative, and do not question the direction of the policy. In fact, the presence of community participation in development programs does not automatically lead to community empowerment (Anomsari & Abubakar, 2019).

2. **Discursive Effects: Obscuring Structural Inequality.** By focusing on participation as a solution, this policy obscures that social and bureaucratic structures heavily influence citizen participation. In the case study of Ngampel Sub-district (Ussyifa, 2023), although six program areas have been implemented according to procedure, the results have not had a real impact because activities remain focused on physical development, not substantive citizen empowerment. This discursive effect produces a false narrative that all citizens have the same opportunity to participate, whereas in practice, some citizens feel that the structure above them has predetermined activities.
3. **Policy Effects: Empowerment Narrowed Down to Technical Activities.** The Prodamas policy narrows the meaning of empowerment to merely implementing projects that can be verified administratively, such as citizen discussions, proposals, and activity reports. As a result, activities such as training or infrastructure development are considered indicators of empowerment, even though they do not always increase citizens' critical capacity or bargaining position. A case study in Setonopande Sub-district (Fachruddin & Kurniawati, 2024), implementation went according to procedure, but citizen participation was still lacking, without any evaluation of whether the form of participation was relevant and inclusive.
4. **Institutional Effects: Strengthening the Dominance of Local Bureaucracy.** Because all proposal, verification, and reporting mechanisms go through the Sub-district apparatus and the city technical team, residents and Pokmas become very dependent on the bureaucracy. This strengthens the dominance of the Sub-district as the authority that can accept or reject proposals. A study in Tamanan Sub-district taman(Ahmad Farhan, 2017)shows that the understanding and relationship between residents and the Sub-district apparatus greatly influence the success of activities.
5. **Material Effects: Inaccessibility of Marginalised Groups.** Some residents are marginalised because involvement is carried out in the formal RT space, and the mechanisms are not designed to reach vulnerable groups. For example, a study in the Bujel Sub-district (Irameimuna & T. Tauran, 2016) found that women's participation still needs to be improved, and that procurement of goods should be directed to creating business opportunities. However, the policy has no mechanism to correct this inequality actively.

Overall, the representation of problems in the Prodamas policy creates an effect that strengthens the status quo: residents are involved in procedural activities, but are not given space to challenge, reformulate, or direct policies meaningfully. Participation is reduced to an administrative act, not a political process oriented towards social justice. In Bacchi's terms, this policy regulates who can speak, how to speak, and within what boundaries of discourse.

How and Where Are These Problem Representations Produced, Distributed, and Maintained?

The representation that the Kediri residents are less participatory and cannot formulate development needs independently does not emerge neutrally. It is discursively produced in policy documents, disseminated through institutional structures and bureaucratic technocracy, and maintained through administrative procedures, narratives of local media

success, and mentoring practices that make residents controlled implementers, not critical actors.

1. **Discursive Production through Policy Documents.** This problem representation was first produced in the policy language as stated in Kediri Mayor Regulation No. 40 of 2014, and replicated in subsequent regulations such as Perwal No. 3 of 2019, No. 23 of 2020, and No. 3 of 2023. Phrases such as “mobilising community potential,” “motivating communities to participate,” and “facilitating communities to articulate needs” are keywords that frame citizens as passive entities that need to be activated. This policy does not recognise citizens as historical subjects with collective experiences but as administrative objects that must be directed.
2. **Dissemination Through Bureaucratic Structures and Practices.** After the policy is established, this representation is disseminated through the Sub-district structure and the role of technical assistants, who carry out the functions of dissemination, facilitation, and verification. In a study in the Setonopande Sub-district (Fachruddin & Kurniawati, 2024), the implementation of Prodamas Plus was described as running according to procedure due to coordination between implementers and complete administration. However, it was also noted that citizen participation was “still lacking,” indicating that the implementation of activities was measured more by compliance with the structure, rather than by critical reflection on the effectiveness of the form of participation. In several places, residents said that the role of assistants was dominant in determining the direction of activities. In interviews, informants. This shows that dissemination practices convey policies and direct how citizens should interpret and respond to them, with compliance.
3. **Verification and Audit Mechanisms.** This representation is also maintained through technocratic logic in administrative control, reporting, and evaluation, as regulated in Chapters IV and V of Perwal No. 32 of 2021. The Verification Team, Technical Guidance Team, and Monitoring Team have a role to ensure that activities are carried out by procedural standards and do not deviate from technical instructions. In this system, participation is assessed from the completeness of documents, not the quality of deliberation or the social impact of activities. The case study in Ngronggo Sub-district (Ainurroziqin & Susilo, 2024) noted that the implementation of activities was by the policy structure, but there was no evaluation of their substantive achievements. It was stated that the desired changes had not yet been seen, and the resources used needed to be further adjusted. This reflects how evaluation remains within the framework of procedural logic, not transformative.
4. **Reproduction in Public Discourse and Political Symbolism.** The Kediri City Government also maintains this representation through symbolic success narratives, such as awarding awards to the best RT or local media coverage of Prodamas activities. A report from Ngampel Sub-district found that RT received an award for successfully implementing Prodamas Plus. However, the same report stated that “the results have not provided real benefits” to the community. This symbolic award strengthens the program's image as a form of state support for the people, even though the substance of citizen empowerment is still limited.

Thus, the representation of the problem constructed by the Prodamas policy is not only produced at the bureaucratic desk, but is actively disseminated and maintained through institutional structures, technical implementation logic, and public narratives that simplify the problem. In Bacchi's framework, this is a form of regime of practice that makes certain

representations seem natural and unquestionable, while simultaneously closing off the possibility of the emergence of more critical and contextual alternative discourses.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that although Prodamas is officially positioned as a place-based empowerment initiative, its policy design and underlying assumptions are still based on technocratic logic that reduces empowerment to procedural participation and administrative compliance, rather than as a process of institutionalising citizen agency or transforming inequality structures. Through Carol Bacchi's WPR analysis framework, the findings show that the representation of problems in Prodamas masks structural inequality, marginalises vulnerable groups, and reproduces bureaucratic dominance under participatory rhetoric. These findings imply that the place-based approach needs to shift from merely opening up participation spaces to strengthening citizens' political capacity, recognising the context of inequality, and dismantling local power relations that are restrictive. This study fills a gap in policy literature in Indonesia that rarely uses critical discourse analysis to dismantle empowerment practices that are considered "neutral". Although limited to document analysis and a number of interviews, this study makes an important contribution by showing how empowerment programs can actually strengthen the structures they seek to change. In the future, further research needs to examine counter-discourses that emerge from citizens' own practices as a path towards a more democratic and equitable local development policy configuration.

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