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The Reframing Urban Governance Through Participation: An Ethnographic Inquiry Into Public Housing Management

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ABSTRACT

This study examines participatory urban governance in the management of public rental apartments (Rusunawa) in the 24-26 Ilir area of Palembang City, Indonesia. It explores how fragmented institutional arrangements and weak coordination among government agencies shape the daily governance of public housing and how residents respond. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were gathered through participant observation, in depth interviews with 20 informants, and field documentation. The findings show that governance of public housing in Palembang operates within institutional fragmentation, where the absence of clear authority and coordination creates governance vacuums that are filled by local actors (neighborhood heads and senior residents). Citizen participation emerges as an adaptive, community-driven practice that sustains everyday management despite limited formal support. This participation is largely informal, negotiated, and rooted in social solidarity rather than formal policy mechanisms. The study reframes urban governance as a lived and negotiated process, emphasizing that sustainable public housing management requires recognizing local capacities, institutionalizing deliberative space, and collaborative support from municipal authorities. The research contributes to the discourse on participatory governance in mid-sized cities of the Global South by highlighting the value of community-based management as a foundation for inclusive and context-responsive urban policy.

Keyword:

Urban governance, public housing, participation, ethnography, community based management

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the globe has experienced an extraordinary rush towards urbanization. This urban expansion has become a worldwide trend that not only fosters economic prospects and social advancement but also profoundly affects the spatial arrangements, environment, and well-being of urban populations (Das et al., 2024). The UN-Habitat World Cities Report (United Nations, 2018) indicates that currently, over one billion individuals live in informal settlements, slums, or regions lacking fundamental infrastructure and sufficient public services. This statistic demonstrates that urbanization does not guarantee an enhancement in living conditions for all residents of cities, particularly for marginalized and low-income groups (Bhunia et al., 2025). Rather than serving as inclusive environments, contemporary cities pose a risk of exacerbating social inequalities and generating new types of exclusion within the residential areas of urban populations (Kolotouchkina et al., 2024; Pickerill et al., 2024).

Urbanization in Indonesia has progressed rapidly, marked by significant urban population growth rates throughout the past twenty years (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Mardiansjah et al., 2021; Silver, 2024). Projections from Bappenas suggest that by the year 2045, over 70% of Indonesia's population will reside in urban centers (Bappenas, 2014). This trend of urbanization is creating an increasing demand for housing that is adequate, affordable, and sustainable (Bhanye et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2021). The current situation indicates that the supply of formal housing frequently fails to keep up with the growing housing needs (Duca et al., 2021). There is a surge in informal settlements consequent of a scarcity of available housing space, and escalating urban living expenses that do not align with the earnings of the urban poor (Anierobi et al., 2023; Hanif et al., 2024). These international and domestic trends emphasize that housing is not only a technical problem but also a governance challenge intertwined with institutional capabilities and the involvement of citizens.

In response to the challenge, the Indonesian government, via the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing (*Kementerian Pekerjaan Umum dan Perumahan Rakyat/PUPR*), created the Simple Rental Apartment (*Rumah Susun Sederhana Sewa/Rusunawa*) model aimed offering vertical housing solutions to low-income populations. The Rusunawa initiative was intended as an efficient spatial and economic housing option, alleviating the pressure on the dwindling supply of urban land. The implementation of Rusunawa in different regions has encountered significant challenges, such as issues related to management after construction, insufficient involvement from residents, a limited role for local authorities, and the absence of an inclusive and sustainable governance framework (Dompak & Salsabila, 2024; Laksmyanti et al., 2025).

In the 24-26 Ilir region of Palembang City, the status of public rental apartments (Rusunawa) highlights the intricate institutional and social challenges associated with urban housing administration (Ramadhan, 2023; Rizal et al., 2023). Although these housing units were established through national government initiatives, many are currently experiencing stagnation in their day-to-day management. Common maintenance tasks, including waste disposal, light fixture repairs, and stair upkeep, often rely on grassroots efforts rather than municipal support. Discussions with community leaders suggest that meetings intended for coordination between residents and the management team are frequently delayed due to unclear roles and limited government participation (Indah, 2022; Mas'odi et al., 2025). As a result, this environment fosters dissatisfaction among residents, deepening feelings of social isolation and diminishing collaborative involvement in governance activities.

These difficulties indicated a more profound issue related to governance which is the disconnection of institutional responsibilities and the lack of a mechanism for participation that connects formal policies to the everyday experiences of residents. This situation

highlights a significant disparity between the ideal participatory housing governance model proposed in national policies and the disjointed, authoritative practices seen in daily management. The strained interactions between residents, apartment management unit (*unit pengelola rumah susun/UPRS*) and local authorities, illustrate how the implementation of policies from the top down does not lead to effective governance responsiveness within communities (Sanga et al., 2022). Informal practices and individual initiatives frequently arise as a consequence of addressing the gaps in governance. These practices are crucial for survival where they heavily rely on specific individuals, such as heads of neighborhoods (*ketua RT*) or elder community members. This condition renders them inconsistent and nonviable across different housing blocks. This reflects what Miraftab (2009) describes as “invented space of participation”, where communities establish their own governance structures when faced with inadequate institutional support.

It is essential to comprehend how residents navigate fragmented governance structures and maintain community management despite limited institutional assistance. This phenomenon has been noted in various Southeast Asian urban areas, where informal and flexible engagement fills the gaps left by formal institutions (Healey, 2006; Repette et al., 2021). This study is significantly related to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Fund, 2015), specifically SDG 11, which focuses on Sustainable Cities and Communities to foster inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban environments; SDG 1, targeting the eradication of poverty; and SDG 10, aimed at reducing inequalities by ensuring vulnerable populations have access to sufficient housing. Additionally, SDG 16 underlines the importance of inclusive, participatory, and accountable governance within communities.

Participatory methods have led to the development of various governance models that are community-based, where citizens take an active role in making decisions, managing infrastructure, and overseeing public services (Krick, 2022). Research conducted in regions such as Latin America (Goncalves & Do Vale, 2023), South Africa (Khene et al., 2021), and Asia (Butcher et al., 2025) indicates that these models can boost ownership, enhance management effectiveness, and ensure the sustainability of programs. The effectiveness of participatory governance heavily relies on the local socio-political environment, the capabilities of citizens, and the readiness of state institutions to distribute power (Hao et al., 2022; Jager & Newig, 2024; Kurkela et al., 2024).

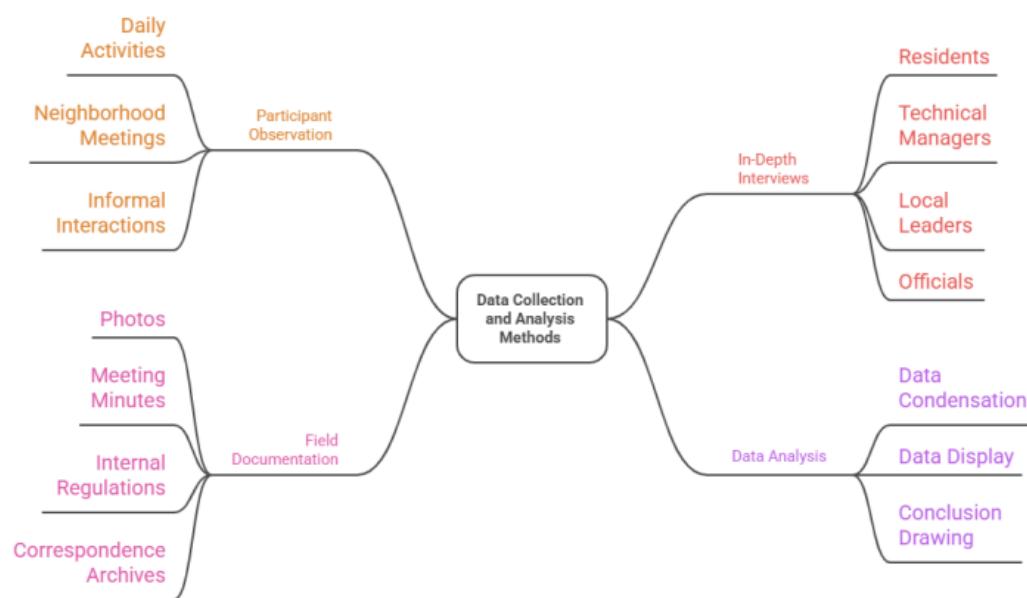
This situation illustrates a distinct discrepancy between the idealized concept of participatory housing governance outlined in national policy and the disjointed, top-down methods evident in actual management practices. This research seeks to examine how participatory government strategies are executed and limited in the management of Rusunawa in Palembang, while also identifying the factors that facilitate or obstruct citizen empowerment within this framework. The theoretical foundation of the study is based on participatory and collaborative governance models (Healey, 2006)(Miraftab, 2009) and is bolstered by contemporary urban housing research conducted in Southeast Asia. This investigation provides a fresh perspective by repositioning urban governance from a citizen-centric viewpoint, highlighting how routine participation and informal activities transform the governance of public housing in mid-sized cities across the Global South.

METHODS

This research utilized a qualitative approach through an ethnographic technique to investigate the social behaviors, relationship dynamics, and meanings of governance among inhabitants of the Rusunawa in the 24-26 Ilir region of Palembang City, Indonesia. The ethnographic methodology was chosen not solely as a means for data gathering but also as a theoretical lens grounded in the interpretivist perspective, which perceives governance as a process that is constructed socially and embedded within cultural contexts (Hammersley &

Atkinson, 2019). Ethnography enables researchers to witness how institutional arrangements are implemented, negotiated, and contested in daily life, thus uncovering elements of participatory governance that are frequently overlooked in studies reliant on documents or surveys (S. M. Low, 2019; Mattila et al., 2022). This methodology is especially pertinent to studies of public housing, where governance is closely linked to everyday interactions, informal practices, and community discussions that cannot be sufficiently captured by short-term qualitative methods.

Data were gathered using three primary methods (Figure 1): (1) participant observation of the daily routines of residents, community meetings, and informal interactions; (2) in-depth interviews conducted with 20 carefully chosen informants, which included residents from various neighborhoods, technical managers, local leaders (RT), and officials from Palembang City Housing and Settlement Agency; and (3) field documentation, which consisted of photographs, minutes from meetings, internal regulations, and archival correspondence. The combination of these techniques offered thorough insight into the practice of participatory governance in public housing. The analysis of data utilized the interactive model proposed by Miles et al., (2014), encompassing data reduction, presentation, and concluding a cyclical process of coding and thematic organization. Guidelines for interviews and observations were created to maintain uniformity in data collection and can be provided upon request.



Source: Processed by Author, 2025

Figure 1. Data Collection and Analysis Method

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Global Shifts in Urban Governance and Housing Research

The international conversation regarding urban governance has experienced a significant shift, moving from a centralized and managerial framework to one that is more participatory and collaborative (Almulhim & Yigitcanlar, 2025; Bradley & Mahmoud, 2022). This new framework highlights the necessity for active engagement from citizens in the stage of planning, execution, and assessment of urban policies. Scholars such as Healey (2006) and Miraftab (2009) underscore the need to interpret urban governance as a multifaceted domain of social interaction (Cars et al., 2018; Van Wezemael, 2016), characterized by ongoing negotiations (Follador et al., 2021) and involving a diverse array of participants, both formal and informal (Huang et al., 2022; Resnick, 2021). Through this theoretical perspective,

structures like apartment buildings or public rental housing are seen not just as physical entities but as socio-political arenas where patterns of citizen engagement, daily governance, and power dynamics are continually evolving (Horlings et al., 2021).

Bibliometric Analysis of Global Scholarship on Public Rental Housing

To grasp how public housing and urban governance are represented in the global academic landscape, a bibliometric examination was performed utilizing Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The word cloud depicted in Figure 2 shows the most common keywords found in research regarding public rental housing. Findings indicate that terms like “housing”, “rental sector,” and “public rental housing” dominate the discussion, with a strong geographic concentration in East Asia, particularly China, Hong Kong, and South Korea (J.-W. Lim et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). This pattern indicates that East Asia remains the epicenter of academic inquiry into public housing governance, while Southeast Asian contexts, particularly Indonesia, remain underexplored.



Source: Prosesseed by Author, 2025.

Figure 2. Analysis Biblioshiny “wordCloud” about public rental housing

Beyond these dominant terms, other keywords such as “affordable housing”, “public housing”, and “social housing” highlight a persistent focus on the themes of affordability, social justice, and the role of the state in ensuring equitable access to housing (Garro-Aguilar et al., 2025; J.-W. Lim et al., 2023). The emergence of related terms such as “urbanization”, “climate change”, “housing policy”, and “governance approach” reflects how contemporary housing studies are increasingly intertwined with broader issues of environmental sustainability and policy innovation (Garro-Aguilar et al., 2025; J. H. M. Lim et al., 2024). Interestingly, the inclusion of terms like “perception”, “psychology”, and “social stigma” suggests that public housing research has expanded beyond economic and policy dimensions into sociological and psychological perspectives, exploring residents' lived experiences and perceptions (J.-W. Lim et al., 2023). The limited appearance of “Indonesia” within this mapping highlights a clear research gap. Studies focusing on Indonesian public housing governance remain marginal in the global literature (J. H. M. Lim et al., 2024), indicating an opportunity to advance scholarly understanding through contextual and ethnographic approaches.

Positioning the Indonesian Case within Global Discourse

This study fills an important void by incorporating the Indonesian perspective, specifically regarding the administration of Rusunawa in Palembang, into the large

discussion of participatory urban governance. It adds both a geographical and conceptual dimension to international housing research. Geographically, it stands out as one of the rare ethnographic investigations from a mid-sized city in the Global South, supplying empirical insight from an area that lacks representation in current scholarly work. Conceptually, it develops a framework that ties participatory governance to routine social activities, demonstrating how community members express their needs, navigate power dynamics, and create collective strategies to oversee shared environments within institutional limitations (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022; Lemanski, 2022).

This research further emphasizes that the traditional top-down, technocratic method of housing governance, prevalent in many developing nations, has been ineffective in addressing the intricate realities of urban existence (An, 2021). Conversely, a grassroots strategy that prioritizes dialogue, negotiation, and cooperation among citizens, civil society, and governmental entities presents a more inclusive and adaptable solution (Chitsa et al., 2022; Seve et al., 2022; Shen et al., 2024). Within this context, public housing becomes a vital platform for achieving the right to adequate shelter (Kucharska-Stasiak et al., 2021; Sharafeddin & Arocho, 2022), while participatory and flexible governance serves as the cornerstone for ensuring enduring sustainability (Bogataj et al., 2023; Li, 2025; Shin et al., 2023).

In the Indonesian setting, challenges such as fragmented institutions, ineffective mechanisms for participation, and a lack of governance models that are appropriate for the local context remain significant issues (Marpen et al., 2022; Sururi et al., 2022; Widya et al., 2023). In light of these difficulties, this research focuses on Palembang's Rusunawa as an essential location to examine how participation takes place in real life. It highlights both the empowering and symbolic aspects of citizen involvement and illustrates how the actions of everyday citizens transform governance within urban public housing.

While international research has largely centered on experiences of East Asia, there has been limited exploration of the Indonesian context, especially in terms of how governance functions in the daily management of urban housing. To fill this empirical void, this study involved fieldwork in the Rusunawa of Palembang city, concentrating on the practical aspects of participatory governance. The subsequent sections will present important findings derived from ethnographic observations and interviews, showcasing the disjointed institution framework, the daily challenges faced by residents, and the various forms of participation that influence urban governance within this local setting.

Fragmented Governance in Public Housing Provision

Field research reveals a notable gap between the established legal structures and the actual practices of apartment management. While regulatory frameworks such as UU NO. 20 Tahun 2011 and Perwali Palembang No.14 Tahun 2010 provide formal guidelines for housing administration, their execution is inconsistent and poorly coordinated among various agencies. For example, the Public Works and Housing Agency is mainly tasked with granting building permits, but does not have jurisdiction over management after construction is completed. The local Housing and Settlement Office possesses limited operational capabilities and ambiguous responsibilities concerning tenant interactions and upkeep of facilities. This disconnect has resulted in an institutional gap, with no single entity taking comprehensive accountability for daily management tasks. This observation is consistent with Anomsari (2015), who asserts that community involvement frequently arises as a responsive measure to local governance situations rather than from a structured institutional framework.

Essential aspects of governance, such as the upkeep of shared areas, mediation of resident conflicts, and facilitation of group decision-making, often remain unaddressed or are informally managed by the residents themselves. For instance, minor repairs to

infrastructure or sanitation issues frequently rely on one-time contributions from tenants or voluntary efforts by local leaders, instead of receiving consistent assistance from municipal authorities. This lack of cohesion not only diminishes accountability but also muddies the lines of authority, resulting in overlapping responsibilities, bureaucratic stagnation, and uneven delivery of service. Within the realm of governance theory, this scenario is indicative of an institutional void (Hajer, 2003), where the lack of effective coordination mechanisms between governmental bodies and community participants undermines the smooth operation of everyday governance, compelling local communities to create informal alternatives to formal institutions. Comparable observations were made by Santoso et al., (2023) and Kushendar (2023), who pointed out that institutional fragmentation and poor coordination among local government bodies frequently obstruct the sustainability of public housing initiatives in Indonesian urban areas. Also, similar issues with coordination were noted in the Smart City project in Semarang, where the divided roles of various agencies impeded successful implementation (Wahyuni et al., 2021).

Everyday Struggles in Rusunawa Management

In the daily experiences of residents in apartments, management is influenced not just by physical limitations but also by complex informal relationships. Conversations with neighborhood associations (RT) showed that many efforts concerning maintenance, safety, and cleanliness are initiated by individuals or local leaders, instead of formal housing authorities. One RT member recounted how he took the initiative to raise money for repairing a fallen staircase and even received backing from a candidate for regional office since the government did not step in. These examples demonstrate how residents manage government gaps through local actions and exchanges based on personal influence, highlighting the development of mixed practices that combine civic engagement with political negotiation.

These informal discussions suggest a transfer of authority from the government to the community, where power and responsibility are reshaped through daily interactions. Instead of merely being passive recipients, residents play a proactive role in creating alternative approaches to accountability and resource gathering to address shared needs. However, these self-organized efforts can also foster dependency and inequality, as the ability to secure support frequently relies on personal connections and political relationships, rather than clear institutional processes. This observation emphasizes what Mirafatab (2009) refers to as “invented space of participation”, where citizens establish informal governance areas in response to the neglect of formal institutions. Thus, the day-to-day challenges faced by Rusunawa residents are not just strategies for survival, but rather representations of adaptive governance that both confront and compensate for the shortcomings of formal systems.

Participation as Practice: Between Empowerment and Symbolism

Resident involvement in the management of apartment complexes seems to exist between merely symbolic gestures and more meaningful engagement. On one side, there are cooperative efforts, referred to as “*gotong royong*”, and community service initiatives initiated by the neighborhood association (RT) that include residents from particular blocks. These efforts tend to be reactive, lack institutional support, and are not linked to long-term strategies. Collective involvement often depends on key individuals like those in RT, rather than on formalized decision-making frameworks. Thamrin (2020) points out that local engagement in physical development frequently stems from grassroots organization within the community instead of being driven by directives from higher authorities, a trend also observed in the management of public apartments in Palembang.

This indicates that participation leans more toward being a cultural and adaptive behavior rather than arising from imposed participatory policies. Initiatives grounded in the community often act as

tools for empowerment in situations where official structures fall short (Anomsari & Abubakar, 2019). This perspective aligns with the findings of van Voorst (van Voorst, 2020), who noted that community-oriented participation often acts as a compensatory response in environments lacking formal mechanisms for engagement. This further supports the theories posited by Arnstein (1969) and Fung (2011) about “degrees of citizen power”, where residents may not wield total control over decision-making but exhibit agency within the limited opportunities available to them.

Reframing Urban Governance

According to observations and interviews, it is clear that urban governance related to public housing can't be simplified to just formal rules and government-led management systems. Rather, the daily experience of residents, informal practices, and local engagement illustrate that governance in Palembang functions as a context-dependent and negotiated process. This observation supports Healey's (2006) idea of collaborative planning and Miraftab (2009) concept of insurgent or everyday governance, in which marginalized groups actively reinterpret governmental regulations through localized efforts.

Examples of these practices include joint repairs and informal coordination among community members, reflecting what Arnstein (1969) termed “degrees of citizen power”, which lie between superficial engagement and true participation. These grassroots forms of involvement show that citizen engagement in urban governance is not merely a matter of procedure but is deeply rooted in cultural and relational aspects that arise from shared needs, limited resources, and adaptive survival methods.

Reconsidering urban governance necessitates a shift in focus from institutional structures to the social practices that people experience. This aligns with Low (2019) assertion that urban governance should be viewed as a lived practice, where negotiation, resistance, and adaptation influence how policies are implemented in reality. In this context, city management becomes more than a technical function; it evolves into a socio-political space where citizens express creativity, agency, and collective resilience. As Tauran (2025), rethinking community empowerment through localized participation allows residents to function as co-governors instead of mere passive recipients, a perspective that is particularly significant for the management of public housing. Understanding these dynamics transforms participation from a tool for inclusion into a fundamental process through which governance is continuously shaped in collaboration with the state and its citizens.

Discussion

Finding related to the disjointed nature of apartment governance indicated a significant gap between the established regulations and their real-world application. While legal documents such as UU no. 20 Tahun 2011 concerning Apartment and Perwali Palembang No. 14 Tahun 2010 offer a foundation for effective management, inter-agency coordination remains insufficient and fragmented. This scenario supports the views of Palmer (2018), who contended that apartment management entities in Indonesia frequently function in an unstructured manner, lacking uniform operational guidelines. The division of authority gives rise to overlapping responsibilities among the central government, local municipal agencies, and community management organizations, which results in unclear policies and inconsistent accountability.

This context has led to what governance researchers refer to as an institutional vacuum (Hajer, 2003), where no single organization takes on the full responsibility for the daily operations of public housing. The Public Works and Housing Agency (PUPR) mainly concentrate on supervising technical construction aspects, while the social, administrative, and community-related matters do not fall within its scope. Issues involving maintenance, conflict resolution, and community organization rely on informal agreements between

residents or local leaders, rather than on formal institutional backing. These institutional gaps are not simply failures of administration; they indicated the larger governance issues encountered by numerous developing urban areas, where the shift towards decentralized policy has not been accompanied by the necessary capability and coherence for successful local execution (Faguet, 2014; Healey, 2006).

In this situation, community members and local leaders are driven to address the gaps through their own initiatives. This situation exemplifies how informal institutional areas develop as people adjust to the lack of effective government systems. Ntwana & Naidoo (Ntwana & Naidoo, 2024) refer to this as the rise of “invited” versus “invented” participation spaces, where neighborhoods create their own platforms for involvement outside established governance frameworks. The role of neighborhood heads (RT) and other community leaders as key participants in the management of Rusunawa highlights how local governance processes depend on individual social connections (Perrigo et al., 2025). Reliance on personal networks often leads to uneven and unsustainable participation, supporting the argument made by Horelli & Wallin (2024) that informal involvement without foundational institutional support lacks lasting deliberative strength (Sinervo et al., 2024).

The daily challenges identified in this research emphasize the importance of utilizing an ethnographic perspective to uncover how governance functions as a lived experience. When residents gather their own resources to fix up efforts, they participate in what Anderson et al., (Anderson et al., 2023) term everyday governance; grassroots action that fills the gaps left by inadequate institutions. Participation in this context exists on a flexible spectrum; at one end, community efforts like “*gotong royong*” and “*kerja bakti*” reflect cultural unity, while at the other, these actions remain reactive and sporadic, lacking ongoing structural support. This dynamic corresponds with Arnstein (1969) and Sharma (2025) concept of “degrees of citizen power”, demonstrating that participation in this instance is primarily symbolic, fostering social cohesion rather than altering power dynamics.

The ongoing informal discussions and collaboration among community members illustrate the agency and ingenuity driving local resilience. These actions can be seen as forms of micro-resistance against bureaucratic exclusion, a concept that Bibri (2020) refers to as “urban intelligence”, where residents utilize adaptable knowledge to maintain shared community life. Such initiatives indicate that governance in affordable housing is not solely dictated by the state, nor is it completely independent; it develops through interactions negotiated among various stakeholders who are navigating both institutional and material challenges.

These insights strengthen the view that urban governance must not be perceived as a straightforward, hierarchical administrative mechanism, but as a dynamic negotiation between established institutions and community practice. The collaborative model proposed by Ansell & Gash (2008) is pertinent in this context, highlighting the importance of creating fair and participatory environments that empower citizens to influence policy orientation and management results. The effectiveness of such collaboration is significantly contingent upon clearly established roles, supportive policies, and community capacity, all of which remain underdeveloped in the context of Palembang Rusunawa. The lack of a formal deliberative platform, unclear management responsibilities, and insufficient civic capacity together emphasize the necessity for systematic capacity enhancement and supportive regulatory frameworks.

From a policy standpoint, these observations directly support SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by illustrating how inclusive housing governance can foster adaptable urban development. When citizens are afforded genuine opportunities for involvement, housing administration becomes more attuned to local conditions, representing a vital aspect of fair urban governance in the Global South, as outlined by UNDP (UNDP, 2023). The experience of residents in Palembang Rusunawa also demonstrates the concept

of "policy learning from below", as described by Long (2004), whereby local innovations and social changes shape more context-relevant policy frameworks.

The ethnographic method employed in this research facilitates a richer understanding of governance as a phenomenon that is experienced and negotiated. Ethnography, rooted in the interpretivist framework, regards the experience of residents as a legitimate source of insight rather than secondary information (K. E. Y. Low, 2015). The informal and contextual governance practice noted in Palembang should not be viewed merely as administrative shortcomings but rather as indicators of the residents' ability to adapt and innovate while facing structural limitations. When properly supported, these practices can lay the groundwork for resilient governance models that are deeply rooted in the community.

The findings call for a reconceptualization of how urban planners and policymakers approach vertical housing governance. Beyond focusing solely on infrastructure and regulations, the community should be recognized as an active participant with the authority, experience, and knowledge necessary to shape the future of urban living. This shift in perspective represents more than just a move towards participation; it signifies a political reorientation of residents within a highly centralized framework of urban governance.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the management of public rental housing in the 24-26 Ilir area of Palembang City functions within a fragmented governance structure, characterized by a disconnect between the establishment of regulations and their execution. This disconnect leads to institutional gaps that are often filled by informal actions from residents. Individuals such as local community leaders and older citizens have taken on roles as unofficial managers, demonstrating that governance in this environment is flexible, negotiated, and context-specific rather than strictly bureaucratic. Resident engagement manifests not as a standardized process but as a lively interaction between symbolic and substantive involvement, showcasing both empowerment and limitations. From a theoretical perspective, this study enhances the understanding of urban governance by redefining it as a negotiated, lived experience, termed "everyday governance" that emerges from community interactions, instead of being solely a procedure driven by the state. By focusing on community experiences, this research addresses a significant gap in the existing literature regarding participation governance in mid-sized cities in the Global South, which are often overlooked in global discussions. The empirical findings indicate that effective public housing management necessitates a transition from purely technocratic oversight to a collaborative, context-aware governance approach that embraces local capabilities, acknowledges informal leadership roles, and institutionalizes participatory dialogue. In terms of practical application, the study advocates for a community-oriented governance framework founded on three essential components: recognizing residents as catalysts for change, establishing independent participatory venues, and ensuring adaptable policy support from municipal authorities. Although this analysis is confined to a specific geographic area and timeframe, it lays a theoretical groundwork for future comparative research in other Indonesian and Southeast Asian cities, aimed at advancing collaborative models of participatory urban governance.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The use of AI-based applications in this manuscript is limited to creating illustrations in research designs and editing language. AI did not involve in data generation, interpretation results, or the formulation of scientific conclusion.

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