How Do Media Narratives Frame Inclusive Governance in Indonesia's Child-Friendly Cities? A Corpus-Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive governance typically denotes an ethical framework that assures jointly, participatory, and culturally sensitive policy-making, especially in the execution of urban child protection initiatives. This research digs into and discusses the public discourse around the Indonesian Kota Layak Anak (Child-Friendly City/KLA) policy, examining the different media narratives on how they emancipate, legitimize, obfuscate, or thwart the principles of inclusive governance. By using a corpus-assisted discourse analysis (CADS) method, the authors carry out an analysis of 136 articles from different national and local media that were published between 2011 and 2025, and talk about the KLA implementation in Surakarta. The analysis operationalizes inclusive governance along system (collaborative, multi-level governance), actor (accountability, deliberative participation), and culture (community-driven governance) dimensions. The findings reveal that community narratives and cultural narratives prevail discursively and that these heavily draw on local traditions, communal involvement, and symbolic activities. Conversely, accountability and institutional collaboration are practically absent from media scrutiny, often mentioned in passing or in gratuitous terms. The media appears to portray KLA more as a ceremonial success rather than an arena for structural policy reform. The article proposes a discourse analysis framework for understanding how these narratives support or undermine inclusive governance. The study thus contributes to the literature of governance evaluation, policy framing, and discourse analysis by designing a replicable method to assess how the public narration mirrors or masks multi-actor urban policy realities.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive governance has undoubtedly become a more normative framework through which to frame urban policy, particularly in contexts dealing with child rights and protection. It involves collaborative mechanisms, multi-stakeholder engagement, and participatory practices not only in government institutions but also in civil society, the media, and local communities. It upholds inter-institutional coordination as well as the involvement of local communities to realize children's rights at the city level-the embodiment of Child-Friendly City (Kota Layak Anak, or KLA) policy in Indonesia. At the national level, Indonesia's Child-Friendly City (KLA) policy is embedded in the Indonesia Layak Anak 2030 agenda, targeting 87 million children, 65 million families, 79,075 villages, 6,793 sub-districts, 516 certified KLA cities, and 34 provinces. National progress is uneven: awardees increased from 126 cities in 2018 to 312 in 2022 and 355 in 2025, yet only 22 reached the "Utama" level and thirteen provinces achieved PROVILA status. Although these national indicators suggest steady expansion, the implementation landscape remains highly competitive and institutionally varied. Within this broader context, Surakarta's recent downgrade from "Utama" to "Nindya" in the 2024 assessment, partly linked to incomplete supporting data and weaker cross-stakeholder coordination, reflects how these structural disparities shape city-level performance and the media narratives surrounding KLA implementation (Indraswari, 2023; Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, 2025; Solopos, 2025). Child-friendly policies in Surakarta are nevertheless often developed through cooperation involving government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and self-built forums. For instance, the Surakarta Committees collaborated with the Kakak Foundation to advocate for smoke-free areas, illustrating how NGOs can promote children's agency in policy processes (Yuliani et al., 2023). Such interorganizational co-work also aligns with emerging models of inclusive governance, in which media and NGOs function as strategic intermediaries that shape public communication and local policy development (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Inclusiveness in governance is one of the main principles and child-friendly cities are still a topic for discussions where this principle is applied to the greatest extent. Physical spaces are not the only area where the digital environment has a role; on the contrary, it has become more and more important to secure children's citizenship and their civic expression, which has been the case in some areas where local leaders have accepted the idea that even in the case of digital mediation, democratic participation could be guaranteed (Novella-Cámara et al., 2021). Nevertheless, when we look at the institutional mechanisms of child participation, they prove to be effective not only through their limitations but also through the way in which the framed policies are perceived and responded to in public discourses. In practice, public facilities that are said to be disability-friendly are often not truly accessible, so that people with disabilities continue to experience physical and psychological barriers in obtaining their rights (Rahayu & Dewi, 2013). Media narratives probably strike the strongest chord when it comes to influencing public perceptions and reactions to policies (Löblich, 2019). Thus, children's representation in media as a participation point is not only a mirror of governance performance but also a vital legitimacy-building factor.

Inclusive governance works its way into cultural norms, traditions, and value systems that ultimately determine how policies are perceived and implemented in cultural terms. The aim of an inclusive city, which is more of a dream than a reality, can eventually obscure the power relations again if the cultural stories are not questioned. In fact, the urban inclusion may give rise to the rhetoric of unity without making any alterations in the structural aspect of exclusion and inequity (Duplan, 2023). Here, media discourse plays the most crucial role since it can either perpetuate or contest the existing shallow representations of inclusiveness (Yu, 2024).
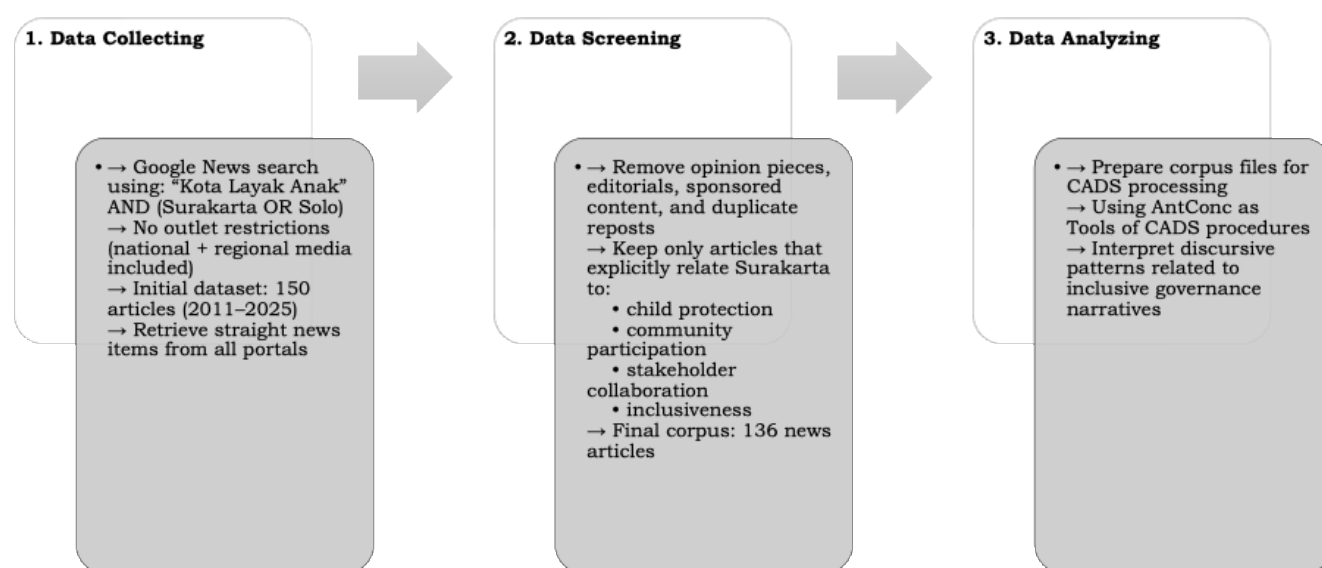
Existing literature has thoroughly covered the topic of inclusive governance regarding institutional design and normative goals, but it still has not very much opened the area of how these ideals are presented to the public and contested by the stakeholders through the mediated narratives. In the case of child-friendly cities, particularly in the decentralizing governance structures such as Indonesia's, public discourse is a very important factor in determining the legitimacy of the policy and the extent to which it is perceived as inclusive. A small number of international media examples also show how child-friendly city initiatives are publicly narrated. An analytical long-form blog article about Rotterdam presents the city's child-friendly urban programme as part of its broader economic and spatial revitalization strategy, highlighting investments in play spaces, mobility reforms, neighbourhood redesign, and community co-creation without adopting an explicitly critical framing (Gill, 2018). Meanwhile, reporting by NPR/KUNC Colorado portrays Boulder's Child Friendly Cities Initiative through youth testimony delivered directly to city council, emphasizing concerns about bullying, safety, and the need for formal civic platforms for young people (VandenEinde, 2025). These cases, though limited, illustrate that media coverage can foreground either institutional efforts or children's own voices, thereby shaping how the "child-friendly" agenda is understood by the public. Still, there is a lack of studies that have critically looked at the way these narratives are presented in the media, the representations they keep alive, and how they are in agreement or disagreement with the actual situation on the ground. Based on the conceptual groundwork laid out thus far, the present study pursues a critical investigation of the discursive construction, mediation, and legitimization of inclusive governance in the context of the implementation of Surakarta's Child-Friendly City (KLA) initiative. The focus is on the media narratives that frame children's participation, government responsiveness, and symbolic versus substantive inclusion in the KLA policy. The research adopts the CADS approach and poses three connected questions: (1) How do media narratives articulate and legitimize inclusive governance claims in Surakarta's child policy? (2) In what ways are children represented as participants, stakeholders, or passive subjects within these narratives? and (3) How do cultural, institutional, and symbolic dimensions interplay to form public discourse on child-friendly governance?

METHODS

The underlying theme in this research traces the discursive formation of an inclusive governance narrative in media discourses dealing with Surakarta's Child-Friendly City (Kota Layak Anak, or KLA) policy through the medium of CADS. CADS (Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies) is an interdisciplinary methodological framework combining the marginal analytical rigour of corpus linguistics with the critical eye of discourse analysis (Egbert & Schnur, 2018; Vessey, 2024; Yu et al., 2024). This enables the researcher to detect frequency patterns and ideological framings and narrative structures in large text corpora (Sagredos, 2019; Yu, 2024). It is here that this kind of approach proves pertinent to governance studies, where meanings of policies are often negotiated and contested in their mediated representations (Afzaal et al., 2022).

This study is following the flow method of some previous studies (Abushunar et al., 2024; Charles, 2015; Heinrich & Evert, 2024; Li & Zhao, 2025; Vessey, 2013). The corpus of this study consists of 136 news articles collected through Google News with the search query "Kota Layak Anak" AND (Surakarta OR Solo). The dataset comprises articles from national and regional media that were published between 2011 and 2025 and were selected due to their thematic relevance to the KLA program in Surakarta. Articles were kept under consideration if they contained reference to child protection, community participation, stakeholder collaboration, or inclusiveness in relation to Surakarta. The texts were subsequently cleaned, lowercased, and tokenized for usability in the analyses after being

subjected to regular pre-analysis procedures peculiar to corpus linguistics. To clarify how the media texts were selected, the study followed a straightforward screening process. All articles were gathered through Google News using the same query, without limiting specific news portals, so that national and regional coverage of Surakarta's KLA policy could be captured. From the initial 150 items, only straight news reports were kept, while opinion pieces and repeated posts were excluded. This is consistent with approaches used in previous corpus-based media studies (Cordeiro et al., 2025; Mockler, 2020). Articles were retained only when they explicitly discussed Surakarta in relation to child protection, participation, collaboration, or inclusiveness. The overall workflow consisted of four basic steps: collecting the articles, screening their relevance, cleaning the text, and preparing the corpus for KWIC and collocation analysis as seen on Figure 1 below.

1. Data Collecting	2. Data Screening	3. Data Analyzing

• → Google News search using: "Kota Layak Anak" AND (Surakarta OR Solo)
→ No outlet restrictions (national + regional media included)
→ Initial dataset: 150 articles (2011–2025)
→ Retrieve straight news items from all portals
	• → Remove opinion pieces, editorials, sponsored content, and duplicate reposts
	→ Keep only articles that explicitly relate Surakarta to:
	  • child protection
	  • community participation
	  • stakeholder collaboration
	  • inclusiveness
	→ Final corpus: 136 news articles
		• → Prepare corpus files for CADS processing
		→ Using AntConc as Tools of CADS procedures
		→ Interpret discursive patterns related to inclusive governance narratives

Source: Processed by Authors, 2025
Figure 1. Research Method Flow

The procedure of examining the media data discourse through this study was accomplished by means of AntConc software, which helped in its systematic exploration. CADS is a methodology that makes it possible for scholars working in the fields of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis to reveal the underlying ideologies, positions of the actors, and social representations in the texts produced by the media (Gillings et al., 2024; Marchi, 2022). AntConc carried out the search for KWIC, keyword quotations with their context, which were subsequently scrutinized to detect the patterns of meaning and the power relations that the Child-Friendly City policy narrative hinted at. The use of this tool enables the researcher to carry out both quantitative and qualitative searches for concordance, collocation, and term distribution (Anthony, 2006; Zih et al., 2020), thus permitting a shift from macro (lexical patterns) to micro (in-depth reading of contextual quotations) analysis. For the corpus analysis, AntConc's keyword-in-context (KWIC) function was used to extract all occurrences of Child-Friendly City. Each instance was displayed in three segments "left context, hit keyword, and right context" which enabled systematic observation of how media sentences positioned and modified the term. This KWIC structure is maintained in the tables to transparently show the framing patterns.

CADS not only permits but also facilitates understanding governance in a more textured way, surpassing the mere consideration of institutional configurations. The process of

governance is influenced by discourse, which comes from public arguments and is recognized through mainstream media coverage. The collaboration of numerical analysis with the interpretation of dialogues in the case of Surakarta's child-friendly policy governance, therefore, reveals both the prevailing stories and the opposing ones. On a different note, CADS serves as a platform for creating universal theories that support the understanding of the negotiation process regarding the principles of inclusive governance in public discourse in urban areas characterized by the overlapping of participatory dialogues and symbolic performativity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The evolving development of media discourse

The development of media discourse surrounding the Child Friendly City-Kota Layak Anak (KLA) policy in Surakarta over time has indicated very clear changes in the way inclusive governance was thought of in different periods as seen on Table 1. The first years-2011-2014-dominated the public narratives that were mostly about the symbolic and infrastructural meanings of child protection. The reports mainly talked about the building of breastfeeding corners (pojok ASI) and the creation of child-friendly areas in public places such as markets, district offices, and schools. For instance, one newspaper article quoted the city authorities saying that "they will construct hundreds of nursing rooms" all over Solo (Satriawan, 2013). These kinds of stories point to the fact that the governing practices were determined by the easy return of visibility and tangibility rather than by those which were based on collaborative planning and participatory inclusion.

Table 1. Evolution and Dimension of Media Narratives on Surakarta's Child-Friendly City (KLA)

Period	Phase	Topic of Discussion	Dominant Dimension
2011–2014	Early Infrastructure Symbolism	Focus on physical development (breastfeeding corner, park), no child actors or systems	Culture
2015–2018	Transition to Collaboration	Beginning of regulations, child identity cards, cigarette campaigns, children's forums formed	System → Actor
2019–2022	Evaluation and Tensions	Criticism emerges, children are involved, narratives of violence and symbolic-substance paradoxes	Actor → System
2023–2024	Public Discourse Peak	Child actor narratives, power conflicts, political participation, exploitation & evaluation	All (integrated)

Source: Authors Analyses, 2025

During the transitional phase of 2015-2018, discourse began incorporating more systematic framing, signaling the first institutionalization of inclusive governance. A critical turning point appears to have been reports published in 2017 devoted to documenting Surakarta's endeavors to legislate public space in harmony with the KLA objectives. This included the intent "to put cigarette advertising outside the city" (Adhi, 2017), and the formal announcement of "smoke-free city hall" (Jatengprov.go.id, 2017a), and "child identity cards" (Kartu Identitas Anak)-aimed at reforming governance (Jatengprov.go.id, 2017b). It shows how the city began regulating its territory in building a formal governance framework

responsive to the children's rights. Yet, despite a burgeoning system dimension, the actual engagement of children and civil society in the discursive realm remained limited.

From 2019 to 2022, a more evaluative and complex-looking critic for the governance has come on stage, contending with symbolic representation. Rhetoric here diversified to examine implementation gaps and contradictions even as Surakarta presented itself in various fora as "Kota Layak Anak Utama." One article cited during National Children's Day highlights wounds from "a dark record of child sexual violence" in Solo, undermining efforts to keep the children safe notwithstanding the city's official accolades (Satriawan, 2022). High cultural innovation occurred during this space, also noted, as with the birth of "Radio Konata," the first child-focused radio in Solo (Prabowo, 2021), that deepened community and child participation through alternative platforms.

Between 2023 and 2024 came the discursive zenith of KLA governance in the media, characterized by the convergence of system, actor, and culture dimensions, and yet the tensions were becoming too pronounced. As an illustration, the article from 2023 portrayed how "Forum Anak submitted complaints to ULAS, prompting responses from Pasar Kliwon subdistrict officials," signifying both deliberative engagement and localized institutional accountability (Wicaksono, 2023). A different article talked about the resistance from the authorities when "a village chief was accused of intimidating the children's forum, endangering KLA status for Solo" (Ariawan, 2023). The stories reveal not only the growing presence of children in the discussions regarding governance but also the power inequalities and the weakening of institutions that are the main reasons for the public participation mechanisms.

The persistence of the cultural aspect is shown by the project "there are now 17 child-friendly places of worship of 6 religions in Solo", that was one of the initiatives to integrate the values of diversity into the social infrastructure of the city (Prakoso, 2022). On the other hand, this period was also marked by critical looks at the city for its symbolic achievements; the reports pointed out that in spite of child-friendly declarations, early marriages, school dropouts and advertising of cigarettes in the vicinity of schools remained as serious issues; thus, the narrative was reshaped from one of celebration to serious inquiry challenging the authenticity of the city's KLA credentials. Here, this discursive trajectory shifts from symbolic infrastructure into an institutional critique in order to demonstrate how the governance of KLA in Surakarta remains to be constructed, challenged, and reframed through public narratives. With this very shift from physical visibility to participatory visibility, from celebratory framing to critical reflexivity, the implications for governance discourse maturity being proffered seem to increasingly find resonance with inclusive sentiment; either resonance is once again caught, however, in the ever-vexing gap between image and implementation.

Dimension Analysis on Inclusive Governance Framework

The system dimension in the discourse of Child-Friendly Cities in Surakarta is often framed through top-down technocratic, regulatory, and collaborative narratives. In the first quote, it is seen how the city government elite (Deputy Mayor) openly appreciates the support of the private sector (Apindo), with the narrative that Solo will become a "real Child-Friendly City that is truly felt to be friendly" by children. This framing shows a symbolic construction that is based on synergy between formal actors, but remains within the authoritative frame of the government. The second quote shows the involvement of legislative actors DPRD members, in assessing the achievements of the KLA program. The phrases "became the concern of members of Commission IV of the DPRD" and "status that decreased" indicate that this systemic discourse also includes evaluation of institutional performance, although it is often reactive, not transformative as seen on table 2. This means that the system discourse

appears more in the form of a response to a decrease in status or failure to achieve targets, rather than a deliberative coordinative initiative. Meanwhile, in the third quote, although the context comes from the village community, the use of phrases such as "programs that we will harmonize" and "Muda Mendunia" shows how the narratives of the residents are absorbed into the bureaucratic-programmatic framework. This reflects the typical character of governance that is oriented towards branding and performance, rather than building a space for dialogue between stakeholders on an equal basis. To clarify how the corpus patterns were derived, the table presents each citation of Child-Friendly City in a keyword-in-context format. The colored text distinguishes the three elements generated by AntConc: the left context (phrases appearing before the term), the keyword itself, and the right context (phrases immediately following it). This layout highlights how media sentences syntactically frame and semantically qualify Child-Friendly City, whether through praise, concern, or programmatic alignment.

Table 2. Corpus Analysis from System Dimension

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
anak," ungkapnya. Wakil Wali Kota Teguh Prakosa mengapresiasi Apindo yang siap membantu menjadikan Solo sebagai (Deputy Mayor Teguh Prakosa appreciated Apindo's readiness to help make Solo a)	*Kota Layak Anak* (Child-Friendly City)	*yang nyata dan benar-benar dirasakan ramah dan menjamin anak-anak nyaman* (that is real, truly felt to be friendly, and ensures children's comfort).
hal ini lantas menjadi perhatian anggota Komisi IV DPRD Surakarta, Ginda Ferachtriawan. Dia prihatin status (this drew the attention of Commission IV member of Surakarta's local parliament, Ginda Ferachtriawan. He was concerned that the status of a)	*Kota Layak Anak* (Child-Friendly City)	*yang sudah dideklarasikan sejak beberapa tahun lalu itu menjadi turun karena berbagai* (declared years ago has declined due to various reasons).
kampung untuk taman bermain anak dengan cara modernisasi digitalisasi. "Akan kita dorong terus untuk program (a village for children's playgrounds through digital modernization. "We will continue to push the program of)	*Kota Layak Anak* (Child-Friendly City)	*yang akan kita serasikan dengan program-program kita, Muda Mendunia. Aktivasi taman* (to align with our Youth Goes Global initiatives and park activations).

Source: Authors Analyses, 2025

Here, the system dimension in the KLA Surakarta media discourse shows the strengthening of the logic of technocratic governance based on programs, status, and collaboration between institutions. However, the substance of deliberative and public accountability is still limited in articulation in the discourse. The local government appears dominant in defining the direction, meaning, and performance of KLA, making the system a more representational dimension than participatory.

Next, the cultural dimension in the discourse of Surakarta's Child-Friendly City (KLA) consistently appears as a symbolic, social, and participatory space that strengthens the city's identity as a child-friendly entity as seen on Table 3. Evidence from KWIC shows strong narratives about the instillation of cultural values through the transformation of space and community practices. For example, in the report "Villages for children's playgrounds through modernization and digitalization," a dualistic strategy emerges between local roots and the direction of modernization. The terms "village" and "playground" indicate the community context, while "digitization" indicates the government's programmatic direction signaling the meeting between cultural values and policies. In this context, culture is not only interpreted as a heritage, but also as an instrument for the formation of safe spaces and social cohesion. Furthermore, the narrative about Konata Children's Radio strengthens the function of culture as a channel for the production of knowledge and children's expression. The radio is described as an alternative space for children to learn and speak out, expanding the scope of governance from physical space to discursive and media space.

Table 3. Corpus Analysis from Cultural Dimension

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
kampung untuk taman bermain anak dengan cara modernisasi digitalisasi. "Akan kita dorong terus untuk program (we will continue to promote the program)	*kota layak anak* (Child-Friendly City)	*yang akan kita serasikan dengan program-program kita, Muda Mendunia. Aktivasi taman* (to align with our youth global program through park activation).
bekal penyiaran kepada anak-anak. Pembentukan Radio Anak Konata juga sekaligus sebagai upaya untuk membentuk (the creation of Radio Anak Konata was also an effort to develop a)	*kota layak anak* (Child-Friendly City)	*di Solo. Seiring perkembangannya, Radio Konata pun banyak meluncurkan program baru yang* (Radio Konata has since launched new programs that…)
itu, Teguh-Bambang juga berkomitmen membentuk Kampung Cerdas Pangan untuk pemenuhan pangan serta mempertahankan predikat (Teguh-Bambang also pledged to establish a Smart Food Village to ensure food security and sustain the title of)	*kota layak anak* (Child-Friendly City)	*enam kali berturut-turut. Pada Pilkada Kota Solo, Teguh-Bambang diusung Partai* (six years in a row. In the Solo mayoral election, Teguh-Bambang was backed by the Party).
Sehat SD Muhammadiyah 1 Ketelan mendukung Pemerintah Kota Solo yang telah berhasil mempertahankan sebagai predikat utama (Healthy School Program at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Ketelan supports the Solo City Government in maintaining the top title of a)	*kota layak anak* (Child-Friendly City)	*dengan mengikuti Festival Pangan Jajanan Anak Sekolah Berbahan Lokal, Berkampanye bersama Yayasan* (by joining the Local-Based School Snacks Festival and campaigning with the foundation).

Source: Authors Analyses, 2025

Another important symbol is Kampung Cerdas, which in the media narrative is referred to as the "icon of a Child-Friendly City." This creates a framing that a child-friendly city is not only built by regulations, but also by socio-cultural villages that are easily accessible and provide space for children's creativity to grow. However, it should be noted that many of these cultural symbols are also used in the government's branding narrative. When healthy snacks, traditional games, and community parks are included in the discourse, the question is whether this arises from the initiative of citizens or as a form of performative herding by the state. In this case, the cultural dimension has a dual position: as an authentic space for social participation, as well as a tool for the articulation of the government's symbolic power. Thus, the cultural dimension in media discourse about KLA Surakarta is not only present as a symbolic complement, but as a space for articulation of local values and horizontal participation. However, the challenge is to ensure that culture is not reduced to a city branding commodity, but rather to a medium for sustainable coexistence and child empowerment.

Moreover, in the debate regarding Child-Friendly Cities (KLA) in Surakarta, the pledge of government actors takes over and shows the unbroken line of policy agendas through different government regimes. Surakarta Mayor Gibran Rakabuming Raka not only stated that "Yes, (keeping a child-friendly city)" is an explicit way of showing his commitment to the continuity of the already achieved KLA predicate (Syarifudin, 2023). This is further supported by the Deputy Mayor's words, which say that the movement is aimed at producing a "strong, solid, intelligent, and healthy" generation, thus highlighting the long term aspect of child development as a strategic social investment. This commitment from the top level is also backed up by the administrative staff like the Head of the DP3AP2KB Service who said, "All the students come from the Education Service," which indicates a structural involvement in the distribution of children's rights to education.

The participation of legislative actors also emerged through the statement of Kinkin Sultanul Hakim (DPRD Secretariat), who stated that there were no technical changes in the agendas for the formation of legislative instruments related to KLA, reflecting institutional consistency in the regional parliament. Meanwhile, community figures such as the Head of

the Muhammadiyah Solo Education and Training Office, Joko Riyanto, emphasized the importance of a non-violent humanistic education pattern in supporting child-friendly values, which is in line with the ethos of non-repressive education culture in community-based schools.

The actor dimension in the context of KLA also reflects the expansion of social roles through the presence of figures such as the Chairperson of the PJAS Festival Committee, Drastiana Nisa, who emphasized the importance of healthy food education as part of efforts to build a healthy and sovereign generation (See: Table 4). Likewise, Minister Yohana and the Deputy for Child Growth and Development of the Ministry of PPPA, Lenny Rosalin, presented a global narrative through the SDGs commitment by stating that "children will be the next generation of the nation's future," showing the affiliation between local agendas and international development goals.

The arrangement of participants in the KLA Surakarta discourse, therefore, illustrates a cooperative ecosystem of political leaders, technical bureaucrats, civil society organizations, and educational community networks. Still, this participation has to go along with the use of participatory evaluation mechanisms and public accountability so that the commitments formed are not purely symbolic. Opening up the channels of communication between the government, legislature, and civil society is a crucial step in changing the KLA discourse to be really inclusive and transformative city governance practices.

Table 4. Corpus Analysis from Actor Dimension

Actor	Roles	Evidence based on KWIC	Stakeholders
Gibran Rakabuming Raka	Mayor of Surakarta	"Yes (maintaining a child-friendly city)," he said.	Local Government
Selvi Ananda	Mayor's wife / Community Leader	"Excellent. Children's Day in Solo must continue to be held," he said.	Civil Society
Kinkin Sultanul Hakim	Secretary of Surakarta DPRD	"There are no technical changes," he said.	Legislative
Agus Tri Pranoto	Head of Sidoharjo Sub-district	"Sragen Regency received the title of KLA Utama," he said.	Local Government
Hanung	Education Leader / Child Activist	"Don't force them to read and write, let them grow creatively," he said.	Civil Society
Ida Bagus Mantra	Government Official	"The local government provides the opportunity to provide the best investment for children," he said.	National Government
Joko Riyanto	Head of Muhammadiyah Education Council	"The Muhammadiyah education pattern was introduced to delegates from 12 countries," he said.	Educational Organizations
Drastiana Nisa	Head of PJAS Festival Committee	"It must continue to be maintained and managed for a healthier nation," he said.	Civil Society
Menteri Yohana	Minister of PPPA	"Children will be the next generation of the nation's future," he said.	National Government

Actor	Roles	Evidence based on KWIC	Stakeholders
Shoim Sahriyati	Director of Kakak Foundation	"The four main scopes of children's rights are stated in the CRC," he said.	NGOs

Source: Authors Analyses, 2025

Discussion

The discourse analysis through CADS methods applied to Surakarta's KLA discourse has shown that hitherto the narrative has shifted from the early symbolic use to critical and institutionalized discourses. However, the transition is very dirty and the argument that participation and power in governance are distributed equally between the different stakeholders is still going on. This is the same situation in other places across the globe, where often the visibility is prioritized over the deliberative engagement (Chawla & Driskell, 2006; Zerlina & Sulaiman, 2020).

However, discourses that emphasize child-friendly infrastructure, such as the provision of parks or, for instance, the "encouraging mother" corner, reflect a major trend found in many child-friendly city programs worldwide. These interventions, while securing the political blessing, still mainly act as signs of development rather than means of engagement (Powell, 2024). It is noticeable that giving priority to physicality over empowerment in governance results in its being nothing more than a presentation of nice but misleading symbols, a phenomenon that has been observed in the CFC frameworks in the MENA region, where projects were mainly paternalistic and dictated from above (Nour, 2013). That is, in contrary to the practice found in Sweden and British Columbia, where participatory models are very advanced, some scientists go on saying that the main factor in the children's future inclusion to the community is the institutional commitment not the visibility (Gurstein et al., 2003; Rodela et al., 2025).

In Surakarta, the later stages of discourse really did show a transformation towards criticism, where the stories started to point out the gaps in implementation and the contradictions between the symbols and the real thing. This is in line with the general trend where child-friendly city frameworks are developing to include more formal structures, such as children's forums and intersectoral legislation, that informally co-opt the discourse softening the criticism that the participation is just symbolic and not transformative (Wridt et al., 2023). On the other hand, these mechanisms often stay separated from the real redistributive decision-making. Studies from South Africa and Nepal have revealed a similar co-optation of participatory language within the elite-dominated structure (Lemanski, 2017; Nikku & Pokhrel, 2013), thus strengthening the criticism that participation is frequently just a show rather than a real change agent.

Comparatively, Surakarta's discursive trajectory mirrors patterns visible in other global Child-Friendly City contexts. In several MENA cities, child-friendly programs often emphasized infrastructural visibility while limiting children's actual decision-making power (Nour, 2013), South African and Nepalese cases similarly reflect elite-led structures that co-opt participatory language without redistributing authority (Lemanski, 2017; Nikku & Pokhrel, 2013).In contrast, regions such as Sweden and British Columbia have developed more robust participatory frameworks where children's inputs are formally integrated into municipal planning (Gurstein et al., 2003; Rodela et al., 2025).These contrasts show that Surakarta's symbolic-to-critical discourse shift is not isolated but part of a broader global struggle between visibility, empowerment, and institutional control.

This research underscores the fact that the elite actors mayors, local legislators, bureaucrats are in charge of creating child-friendly stories. Even though the media has been giving more attention to children since 2019, their influence is still often filtered, delegated, or even ceremonial. According to Derr & Tarantini (2016), the participation of young people

is typically considered as a performance, thereby denying children the opportunity to benefit from the transformative power of participation. Powell (2024) advances this critique by pointing out a "performance of participation," where inclusive language is used to hide exclusionary practices. The likes of Forum Anak and Radio Konata are indeed manifestations of expressive inclusion, but their input into the actual decision-making process is still limited, shaped from the outside, and mired in bureaucracy.

Cultural dimensions of KLA, while appearing to be inclusive, do bear the potential for symbolic appropriation. Projects such as Kampung Cerdas and food festivals however, often serve the latter functions of branding instead of empowering and consequently, depict the imagery of community-driven development. Derr (2024b, 2024a) and (Kong & Yeoh, 2003) warn that when state narratives appropriate local culture, participatory instruments might change into symbols of power through which the state consolidates its power. In Surakarta, the media's focus on cultural content signals discursive saturation that compensates for the inaction of the institutions involved.

The influence of media on this dynamic is too great to be overlooked. Research in Hong Kong and the MENA region reveals that child maltreatment is often presented in the media as an individual problem, which leads to a detachment from its structural roots and therefore, causes reactive policy responses (Dockett et al., 2012; Ho & Chan, 2018). In Indonesia, media discourses often magnify ceremonial successes while underreporting systemic problems such as poor infrastructure, early marriage, or educational inequality (Prihantini & Kurniawati, 2019). Moreover, media portrayals of children, particularly those who are disabled or marginalized, are often mediated by adults, thereby limiting the expression of true views and perpetuating fictitious representations (McAndrew et al., 2021). In Surakarta, the press sometimes quotes children in a symbolic manner (e.g., slogans during Children's Day) but hardly ever consults them in a substantive way regarding governance.

The political economy of media coverage is one of the major factors in constructing child-friendly stories. In Indonesia, a country with very few major media owners, the local governments frequently conduct media campaigns to show their political success and win more support from the government above them. This is consistent with what Tang et al. (2025) said, that the media's portrayal of incidents would set the policy agenda in China's CFC initiatives and, thus, the government would respond for such a short time. In Surakarta, the same situation seems to exist where particular campaigns like no-smoking declarations or child-friendly worship places get a lot of media coverage, while long-term budget allocation and interagency accountability are hardly reported on. This selective coverage creating a situation that is somewhat like a cycle, where the government is backed by the media only when the issues are newly visible rather than the reform being done at the root causing the issues to disappear.

CADS proves very important in showing how these stories are told and changed over time. Hansson & Page (2022) demonstrate that governments frequently use images such as appeals to authority or the language of development to cover up their shortcomings in governance when communicating with the media. In Surakarta, the process of such strategies keeps the reputational legitimacy strong, whereas the legitimacy of participation remains weak or even non-existent. (Powell, 2024) remarks that child-friendly policies in Southeast Asia, especially, have become international alignment indicators like (e.g., with SDGs or UNICEF benchmarks) rather than real transformative local agendas.

The struggle for representational equity is still greatly impacted by those who take an epistemic stance, as they regard children as incompetent. Most of the time, the contributions of children to urban planning are left under the technocratic expertise, as pointed out by (Jeanroy et al., 2025). In the same way, (Jayman & Quickfall, 2024) claim that co-governance with the youth in education is still very rare; token consultations are the ones that still

prevail. In Surakarta, children are represented in discussions but not in the institutions that have the power to affect change.

The difference between the rhetoric of the empowerment and the rhetoric of the empowerment has to do with using inclusive language. (Cámara & others, 2023) point out that structural barriers such as adultism, fragmented mandates, and lack of participatory budgeting need to be overcome for the children to be meaningfully involved. The government should evaluate its mechanisms not on the basis of visibility, but on the basis of inclusion, so that the viewpoints of children become part of laws, plans, and tools for implementation and monitoring. The Participation in Decision-Making Questionnaire is one of the tools that allows measuring whether the children are heard and whether they, in turn, have an impact(O'Hare et al., 2016).

These findings point to several policy implications for strengthening Surakarta's KLA governance. Since the CADS analysis reveals that participation is still largely ceremonial and mediated by elite actors, the city needs to institutionalize mechanisms that ensure children's voices directly shape planning and evaluation cycles. This includes formalizing youth consultations in development forums, integrating child-focused participatory budgeting, and establishing clearer accountability across agencies responsible for KLA indicators. Importantly, media visibility should not be treated as a proxy for progress; policy effectiveness must be assessed through substantive improvements in child protection, mobility, safety, and voice. Without these structural shifts, Surakarta risks perpetuating symbolic inclusion despite its strong public commitment to child-friendly governance.

In this way, while the discourse around the KLA in Surakarta might seem to be progressive, it actually represents the problem of the whole system in terms of governance that is inclusive. Moving, however, from ceremonial inclusion to real participation requires the establishment of intergenerational dialogues, the decentralization of authority and the creation of feedback loops within governance cycles (Bussu & Bartels, 2014; Collins, 2024). Only then will child-friendly cities be able to change from a narrative aspiration to a reality of policy reform.

CONCLUSION

This study has tracked the discourse of the Child-Friendly City (KLA) policy in Surakarta which has been examined through time, stakeholders, and dimensions of inclusive governance. The CADS analysis is visible in the fact that public narratives have moved from the early concentration on symbolic infrastructure to more complex reflections involving performance issues pertaining to institutions, tensions in participation, and discursive contestations. While the display of commitment by the city to child welfare is evident in the media representations, messages are filtered through elite agenda, ceremonial language, and performative governance. Although there is a slowly but steadily increasing presence of child actors and voices from the community, their roles are still more representational than transformative. Such tensions between symbolic promises and institutional inclusivity manifest the incomplete transition of Surakarta into new governance. Out of all these scenarios emerges a multi-layered narrative of governance which is unfolding-a narrative that celebrates achievements, admits of tensions, and opens public space for critique. However, the maturity of this form of governance-translating into inclusivity-is still subsumed within structural inertia, ragged coordination, and asymmetric power relations. The basic condition for narrowing the gap between rhetoric and practice will be to replace the participatory mechanisms used with those that distribute voice, agency, and accountability meaningfully among children and other marginalized actors. For policymakers, the findings point to the need for participation mechanisms that move beyond ceremonial events such as incorporating children's input into routine coordination and ensuring clearer accountability

across agencies. For media practitioners, the study suggests adopting more critical and balanced reporting that not only highlights achievements but also identifies structural gaps and responsibilities. These steps can help align public narratives with more substantive forms of inclusive governance. This study is pressingly critical of media discourse being the primary unit of analysis. Despite the richness that CADS allows in exploring public narratives, much about behind-the-scene policymaking processes and lived experiences of child participation at the grassroots level does not come into view. The one-city focus of Surakarta would also mean a lack of generalizability across urban contexts in Indonesia. Future research may broaden the horizons by complementing interview-based ethnographic work within local stakeholders, including children themselves, to tap on how discursive inclusion articulates with or conflicts with the everyday governance realities. Cross-city comparative studies would also ensure repertoires show structural and cultural differences in how the Child-Friendly City frameworks are implemented. Digital aspects of child participation, especially in online spaces, will cast new light on children's exercise of agency in the age of mediated governance.

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