

## Community Consultations: Active Citizenship or Clientelism?

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### ***Abstract***

*Public Consultation Forum is part of Musrenbang (Annually Community Consultations on Development Planning) which is intervened as a part of local budgeting planning cycle phase. Its process is designed to be oriented on development planning decision making with democratic and participatory format. Viewed from social accountability dimension, are those involved actually active members or clientelist? This article aimed to analyze the “active client-community” phenomenon pitfall, because its role is important to its process quality and output.*

*The result of a multiple case study on Surakarta and Magelang Cities indicated that the concept of active community has different meaning viewed from forum and context of social accountability function. The government invited the participants considered as active according to bureaucrat assessment. On the behalf of more efficient forum, there was forum cooptation through technical instruction on forum organization. As a result, essentially public consultation made a quasi-dialog to make decision accountably. It was because the active participants involved were actually the coopted clients corresponding to government procedure.*

*The conclusion was that formality cultural environment of bureaucrat and comodification habit within society generated pathology obscuring the meaning of “active community” against “active clientelist”.*

**Keyword:** *participatory, citizenship, social accountability, Pathology*

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## **Introduction**

Public consultation intended in this article is a part of Community consultations on development planning, part of musrenbang, held annually from the village (Desa/Kelurahan) level (on January) to the municipal level (on April). The outcomes are part of planning phase APBD (Local Public Budgeting) budget cycle. Its process is designed to be oriented to decision making regarding development plan with democratic format and containing participation element from the community group called activist (active citizen).

The novelty of article is that it questions the originality of participating activist representatives. Viewed from social accountability dimension, are those involved active citizens, or active clientelist? This article aims to analyze the trap of “active society” phenomenon, because the position of participant is important for its process and output qualities. The novelty revealed in this article is the preposition found that a product of democratic process does not always contribute to reinforcing the element of democratic value because of pathological trap. This research finds that pathological trap occurs due to two factors. Firstly, congenital defect of culture becoming the foundation of democratic mechanism process organization. Secondly, the culture creating the behavior of actor involved in such democratic process.

## **Literature Review**

The concept of active citizen in social accountability, according to Clarke and Missingham (2009). The concept of active citizen represents three issue domains: (a) participation from the bottom; (b) right-based development; (c) recognition over the importance of government’s role in responding well to the citizen and supporting the development partial to the citizen, particularly the fulfillment of marginalized citizen’s rights. **Active citizenship** means people getting involved in their local communities and democracy at all levels, from towns to cities to nationwide activity, from small local issues to national issues.

Normatively, active citizens are represented as the primary key to the participatory sustainable development, because they can build their bargaining position with the government and other public agents involved in community issue for the decision making process regarding development in the area where they are exposed to its effect. As a result, the decision made will affect positively the wide public and will improve the public’s trust in the sustainable development policy. Normatively, active citizen serves (i) to represent the community to voice the choice of its development need priority; (ii) to monitor the public service justice in grass roots level, (iii) to reinforce local participation in government

process, not only participating in general election. Direct public involvement in decision making is also called citizen governance.

Citizens have some ways of affecting the public decision making by bureaucrat and politician on the behalf of their interest. Those ways are varied from traditional democratic action such as general election, petition development and lobbying, to more informal ways such as public consultation, complaining and community-based decision making (Fung, 2006). In democratic governance, a basic democratic assumption is inherent closely related to power sharing, the balance of power between state and civil society involvement. Active citizen involvement in overseeing the political and bureaucratic officials in policy issue, policy making process or service function implementation are the form of democratic practice (Malena, et.al., 2004), as the part of democratic governance when associated with the concept of civil servant and state balance (power sharing).

However in practice, Peter (2009) mapped from the result of public participation tending to be biased politically to high-income and high-education groups. Meanwhile, democracy implies that citizens should participate on equal terms (Dahl, 1953 in Peter, 2009). In participatory public budgeting forum, biased opportunity of active citizen is found toward the group having excessive power (Hong, 2015). Practitioner and academician community bridges this gap between theory and practice to accept inequality entrenching in this social structure and they keep applying democratic procedure despite this limitation. This acceptance results in paradoxical consequence to the element of participant representation inclusiveness in public consultation forum because there is an assumption that active citizen is potentially mobilized. On the contrary, leaders are considered as process controller in relatively egalitarian position to distribute resources. Governance approach develops participative community of active citizen in building civil capacity to raise interest (demand) of those involving in governance by the government. At the same time, either intentionally or unintentionally, ethos of the citizens' submission and reluctance or pride are also cultivated because the citizens are involved in power, thereby clientelism ethos occurs (Cox, 2009).

The concept of social accountability emphasizes on the role of active citizen to reinforce the public accountability assuming that the community group acts and is partial to the community group it represents thereby preventing the public resource stealing from occurring for elite group. The fact shows that even community group tends to behave opportunistically and to act unaccountably (Yang and Callahan, 2005 and Falaschetti, 2009). It is the civil society paradox that potentially generates citizen-clientelism paradox.

This paradoxical phenomenon of active citizen participation and passive clientelism is found in public consultation forum case for participative local budgeting in Surakarta and Magelang Cities, Central Province, Indonesia. The explanation of pathological risk

appearing between government and active citizen in participative budgeting process in this research location is explained by agency theory from institutional perspective.

Institution is established around agency and changes when dealing with agency as the response to an essentially rudimentary relation that is not always consistent with what expected by those related. Community then creates institutions to manage and to adapt to and perhaps to be distorted by such the rudiment (Mitnick, 2006). Agency theory explains that the principal-agent relation potentially creates moral hazard and opportunistic behavior constituting normative deviation. Moral hazard is the problem appearing when the agent does not implement what approved with the principal (normative). Opportunistic behavior is to utilize resource and access owned for self interest.

The use of agency theory in public sector refers to Lane (2002) stating that a modern democratic state builds on a hierarchy of principal-agent relationship in public sector. Politician serves as an agent, government as an agent and electorate community as principal. Citizen Representative can also be an agent in the case of it represents other citizen group. Basic assumptions about the problem of accountor-accountee relation used in agency theory are self-interest ad opportunistic behavior, used to explain pathological forms emerging in public consultation mechanism in this local budgeting process.

The deviation of active citizen's role is more conditioned in Prismatic Society environment as Sala model of bureaucracy (Riggs, 1998). One characteristic of formalism is the presence of high incompatibility of many things specified formally to the real practice or action in the field. It is on cause of the paradox between active citizen and clientelism in public consultation forum designed in democratic format.

## **Discussion**

This research on the role of active citizen in public consultation forum in Magelang and Surakarta Cities, Central Java Province, Indonesia employed qualitative method. The strategy used was case study with phenomenological focus that would reveal pathological matter in a series of public consultation mechanism process for local budgeting plan. This research employed constructivism paradigm in interpretive perspective, analyzing the phenomenon of actor's behavior and point of view in public consultation process mechanism practice for budgeting planning in Surakarta and Magelang Cities, in order to find contextual matters leading to biased actor behavior from normative theory of active citizen's role. This research was case study taken from collective case study, studying the forms of cases meeting the element of public consultation forum mechanism application in a series of local planning and budgeting process in Surakarta and Magelang Cities.

Public consultation in Surakarta and Magelang Cities is indicated with the phenomenon of elite domination. Although normatively there is an open invitation, in practice the committee has decided on those that will become the participants. The representatives chosen tend to be biased elite, the group close to the power influence, for example: chief of RT/RW (neighborhood), society leaders managing the society institution, party cadre, and activist who are vocal (and becoming the target to be submitted to the government), and organization enlisted formally in the registration of City Government. Normatively, public consultation is formulated as citizen forum, but some activists are still proud of being involved as the part of power. It results in the active citizen representative's reluctance to voicing the opinion different from the government's majority agenda.

From forum dynamic aspect, pathological phenomenon of forum cooptation can be indicated reinforcing clientelism symptom in premature decision making. Through an excuse of making the forum more efficient and effective, the participation mechanism in the forum is governed by the power holder (ruler)/bureaucrat. In the forum, there is no dialogue process answering rationality behind the decision making. What occurs is building consensus between government agenda and active citizen representative in the coopted forum nuance.

Behind the role of active citizen forum, any things characterizing the presence of civil citizen's opportunism cultivating the growth of clientelism. For example, the case of Solo Consortium conflict, Kompip (*Konsorsium Monitoring Pemberdayaan Institusi Publik* = Public Institution Empowerment Monitoring Consortium), and Sompis (*Solidaritas Masyarakat Pinggiran Surakarta* = Surakarta Suburban Society Solidarity) due to fund source and personal existence access obtained from donor institution. The citizen activist's compliance is shifted from the citizen's autonomy reinforcement idealism to self-existence reinforcement inherent to the power holder (monetary or social position).

The incentive of transportation fund for the presence in citizen forum as the substitute for opportunity cost is very dominant. The informant states that there is a profession switching from traders to meeting activist. The more the NGOs facilitate the reinforcement of citizen forum, the larger is the money incentive received. It grows civil society's dependency and clientelism on those often paying them to participate in citizen forum.

The development of active citizen forum often involved in public consultation forum with diverse background has good side, that is, generating the citizen's consciousness that organizing in the citizen forum will improve bargaining position in the attempt of struggling for their fate. However, the bad side is that this citizen forum elite tends to be entrapped in making forum commodification, because it has bargaining power before the government due to mobilized mass. The potential pathology appearing is policy broker in black market transaction and tending to reinforce the clientelism of power holder. For

example, from the case of public consultation for Street Vendor organizing process in Surakarta and Magelang City, a phenomenon results in which the forum group tends to get more facility benefit from government, constituting more strategic and more locations, than other passive members, or obtaining additional project from government.

The result of research also identifies the presence of active citizen group serving as the arbitrator when there is a case between certain citizen group and government. Information from both government and citizen activist, both in Surakarta and in Magelang Cities, informing that there is an active citizen groups the government uses to suppress other active citizen groups in order not to do any thing endangering the government policy's stability. Another mode is used in which the citizen activist becoming the clientelist of power offers solution to solving problem in isolation room between them so that it will not be opened to the wider public.

The general pattern taken from this multi-cases research on Surakarta and Magelang Cities shows that there are active citizen tending to be coopted in power circle solidifying the clientilism-patronage relationship, built in the mechanism of public consultation participation. It showed that democratic paradox in which the participative mechanism that should reinforce autonomy and independency of citizen activists in controlling the power instead perpetuates the power domination relation.

### **Conclusions and Future Study**

It can be concluded that the clientilism of active citizen in public consultation space results due to the effect of democratic paradox in Sala bureaucracy context. Sala bureaucracy context results in excess bureaucrat behavior and Local Legislative Assembly (DPRD) prioritizes the patron-client relation as the participants of public consultation. Democratic paradox results from representation, participation, inclusion and accountability elements, that then lead to the following problems. (1) who represents whom, (2) voicing whose interest, and (3) how the negotiation process transparency.

In such environment, active citizens utilize the forum of obtaining economic and non-economic benefit for themselves. Meanwhile, the power holder also utilizes the presence, voice and excessive power it has to make the agenda setting of power holder run smoothly. Here active citizen paradox occurs in public consultation forum. The process mechanism runs in democratic format but reflects on the result actually in contradiction with democratic value.

This research finds that the qualities of democracy and bureaucracy impact on the quality of public consultation forum. When the democratic quality is procedural-oriented, and bureaucracy contains collusion and nepotism defect, the public consultation forum will also

have defect with forum cooptation and comodification, solidifying the patron-client relation. The result is pseudo active citizen and pseudo public consultation forum.

The framework of pathology emergence is summarized below.

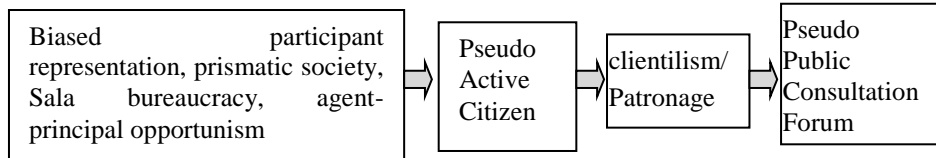


Figure 1. The Cause - Effect Active Citizen - Clientilism/Patronage Paradox, Source: Data Analysis (2015)

Considering the result of research on Surakarta and Magelang City, the next challenge for further study is to conduct a fundamental research on how shifting the public consultation forum discourse is accountability forum in order to meet the client's need to how to improve the quality of public consultation forum as the citizen's autonomy space conducting monitoring and control. In other words, how to shift accountability as responsibility to accountability as answerability discourses. In practical domain, there should be follow-up research on how to reduce the risk of the paradox, there is an urgent need for a suitable incentive to develop the genuine public participation and the public capabilities to ensure the accountability in the public consultation forum for participatory budgeting process.

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