Policy Communication and Resistance: Comparative Analysis of Malioboro Street Vendor Relocation

Komunikasi Kebijakan dan Perlawanan: Analisis Komparatif Relokasi Pedagang Kaki Lima Malioboro

Anggun Mutiara Kasih[1]*, Lukman Hakim[2]
[1,2] *Communication Science Department, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia*

Abstract

*Relocation of street vendors (PKL) in Malioboro Yogyakarta to Teras Malioboro 2 has triggered social resistance and policy communication challenges. Despite aiming to transform the area into a world-class cultural heritage destination, the relocation faced critical issues of information clarity, public participation, and justice perceptions. This study examines public communication strategies by local government and evaluates how relocation policy messages were received and interpreted by two key groups: vendors and visitors. Using a critical-constructivist qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 informants (5 vendors, 3 vendor associations, 5 visitors) at Teras Malioboro. Thematic analysis revealed three core findings: (1) **Information asymmetry** caused confusion and distrust due to inconsistent policies and lack of transparency in stall allocation; (2) **Minimal two-way dialogue** intensified resistance, with vendors excluded from decision-making; (3) **Divergent decoding positions** (Hall's theory) emerged: dominant acceptance (optimistic vendors), negotiated understanding (critical visitors), and opposition (marginalized vendors). Policy Implementation Theory (Pressman & Wildavsky) contextualizes communication gaps as implementation failures, while Stakeholder Theory (Freeman) highlights unbalanced interest management. Results emphasize the need for participatory, transparent, and culturally adaptive communication strategies in public space governance.*

Keywords: relocation, policy communication, social resistance, Malioboro, public communication strategy.

Abstrak

Relokasi pedagang kaki lima (PKL) Malioboro Yogyakarta ke Teras Malioboro 2 telah memicu resistensi sosial dan tantangan dalam komunikasi kebijakan. Meskipun bertujuan menjadikan kawasan ini sebagai destinasi warisan budaya kelas dunia, proses relokasi menghadapi masalah krusial terkait kejelasan informasi, partisipasi publik, dan persepsi keadilan. Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi komunikasi publik pemerintah daerah serta mengevaluasi bagaimana pesan kebijakan relokasi diterima

dan dimaknai oleh dua kelompok utama: pedagang dan pengunjung. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif kritis-konstruktivis, wawancara mendalam dilakukan terhadap 13 informan (5 pedagang, 3 perwakilan asosiasi pedagang, dan 5 pengunjung) di Teras Malioboro. Analisis tematik mengungkapkan tiga temuan utama: (1) Asimetri informasi menimbulkan kebingungan dan ketidakpercayaan akibat kebijakan yang tidak konsisten serta kurangnya transparansi dalam pembagian kios; (2) Minimnya dialog dua arah memperkuat resistensi karena pedagang tidak dilibatkan dalam pengambilan keputusan; (3) Perbedaan posisi decoding (berdasarkan teori Hall) muncul, yaitu penerimaan dominan (pedagang optimis), pemahaman negosiasi (pengunjung kritis), dan penolakan (pedagang termarjinalkan). Teori Implementasi Kebijakan (Pressman & Wildavsky) memaknai kesenjangan komunikasi sebagai kegagalan implementasi, sedangkan Teori Pemangku Kepentingan (Freeman) menyoroti ketidakseimbangan pengelolaan kepentingan. Hasil penelitian menegaskan perlunya strategi komunikasi publik yang partisipatif, transparan, dan adaptif secara budaya dalam tata kelola ruang publik.

Kata Kunci: relokasi, komunikasi kebijakan, resistensi sosial, Malioboro, strategi komunikasi publik.

PENDAHULUAN

Urban revitalisation is an important strategy in modern urban development, notably in dealing with population density, tourism demand, and the preservation of public space. This strategy includes a variety of initiatives aimed at restoring the city's image, such as spatial planning and aesthetic improvements, as well as shifting informal economic actors to more representational and orderly neighbourhoods. In developing countries, particularly those in the Global South, this revitalisation process frequently has a direct impact on public areas with significant symbolic and cultural importance. Rather than simply functional spaces, public spaces in this setting serve as social arenas for discussions about identity, the people's economy, and the city's historical story. (Noviadhista, 2019).

In the context of Yogyakarta, the revitalisation of Malioboro Street has involved the relocation of street vendors (Pedagang Kaki Lima or PKL) to the Malioboro Terrace area. This policy aims to create a tidier and more tourist-friendly pedestrian zone while maintaining the livelihoods of informal traders. As shown in Figure 1, the number of traders relocated to Malioboro Terrace illustrates the scale of informal economic activities managed under this revitalisation effort. The data highlights how significant the presence of street vendors is in shaping the socio-economic dynamics of the area and underscores why their relocation has become a sensitive and highly debated issue in public policy discourse.
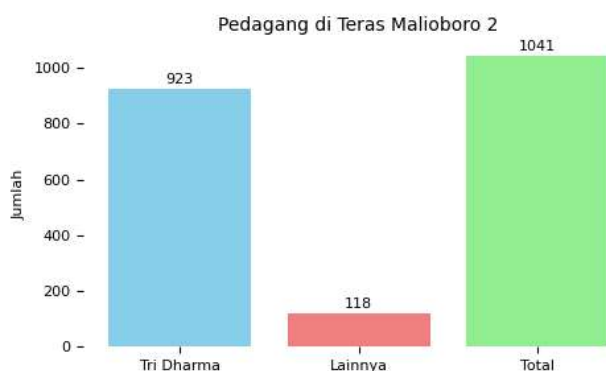
Figure 1. Data on Traders on Malioboro Terrace

One of the more contentious approaches to revitalisation strategies is relocating street vendors (PKL) from old city centres to other, more organised sites. Although relocation plans are meant to improve the order, aesthetics, and comfort of public areas, they frequently elicit societal resistance, particularly when implemented without transparent and participatory public communication. According to (UN-Habitat, 2023), a lack of communication between the government and the community in revitalisation initiatives is a key cause of social friction, economic marginalisation, and a deterioration in policy legitimacy in the eyes of the public. In this context, it is critical to recognise that policy communication is more than just a means of communicating information; it is also a forum for negotiating meaning between the state and citizens.

The Indonesian context provides a highly important case study in this discourse, particularly in Yogyakarta's Malioboro district. Malioboro is not only a popular tourist site, but also a cultural icon with historical, social, and economic value. Since the 1980s, street sellers have been an important aspect of the Malioboro environment, forming an informal economic ecology alongside cultural tourism and colonial architectural legacy. In 2025, the Yogyakarta Special Region Government implemented a large-scale policy to relocate Malioboro street sellers to Teras Malioboro 2 as part of attempts to reorganise the area to meet UNESCO World Heritage Site requirements. While the policy's overarching purpose is to produce an orderly, clean, and world-class public space, its implementation has been beset by a number of issues. (Rozzaaq, 2024).

Many vendors objected to the relocation process, which they saw as hasty, non-transparent, and missing significant input from affected parties. At the same time, several tourists voiced regret with the loss of Malioboro's unique egalitarian and spontaneous environment. The transition from a dynamic to a sterile environment, combined with the lack of direct engagement with vendors, resulted in social alienation in the visitor experience. This phenomena implies that opposition to the relocation program is motivated not simply by economic considerations, but also by the symbolic qualities of public space as a cultural and emotional arena. As a result, studying policy communication in this environment is critical for understanding the complexities of public acceptance and opposition to public policy. (Noviadhista, 2019).

Several earlier studies have looked at Malioboro street vendor movement from both an economic and spatial perspective. (Rozzaaq, 2024) emphasised the considerable decrease in vendor income after relocation, whereas (DP et al. 2023) highlighted spatial planning and its impact on regional mobility. Another study, by (Rabrusun and Lopulalan, 2023), investigated policy communication in the context of regional language preservation, but did not explicitly address the dynamics of policy communication in the change of highly symbolic public spaces. Thus, despite contributions to the relevant literature, no study has completely explored how relocation policy messages are generated, delivered, and received by various community groups, particularly in cultural venues such as Malioboro.

Previous studies on the Malioboro street vendor relocation have primarily focused on its economic and spatial implications, with limited attention to how communication between policymakers and stakeholders shapes policy reception. This gap underscores a crucial problem: the lack of understanding of how policy messages are interpreted, negotiated, or resisted by affected groups. To address this issue, this study combines policy communication methodologies with a public reception analysis of street vendor relocation by integrating three major theoretical perspectives. First, Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory (Hall, 2020) explains how audiences actively interpret and respond to messages based on their social context, experiences, and positions of power, allowing this study to identify decoding positions dominant, negotiated, and oppositional among vendors and visitors. Second, Pressman and Wildavsky's Policy Implementation Theory views policy

implementation as a complex communication process, where failure often stems from miscommunication, inconsistent interpretation, or weak feedback mechanisms; this helps explain how information asymmetry and limited participation became forms of implementation failure in the Malioboro case. Third, Freeman's Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the importance of balancing stakeholder interests and ensuring inclusive communication, highlighting how participatory dialogue and mutual recognition can reduce policy resistance. The synthesis of these frameworks provides a comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of the social dimensions of policy communication in cultural public spaces, showing that policy success depends not only on technical design but also on how meaning is communicated, received, and negotiated among diverse stakeholders.

The theoretical contribution of this study is not only the combination of theories used, but also the development of a new concept, "production-space proximity," which explains that how close individuals are socially and economically to the relocated space influences their level of resistance to a policy. In this situation, traders, as direct economic players, exhibit oppositional behaviour, but visitors, as indirect users, are more likely to be in a negotiation decoding position. This notion broadens our understanding of how spatial links influence the interpretation of policy communications and emphasises the fact that policy audiences are diverse. (Hall, 2020).

In practice, the study's conclusions give an evaluative framework for policymakers, particularly when it comes to maintaining world cultural heritage sites. To avoid unproductive opposition, policy communication tactics must be adaptive, interactive, and contextual (Rabrusun & Lopulalan, 2023). This study provides critical insights for local governments regarding the value of two-way communication throughout the policy making process, from planning to evaluation. These findings can help tourism area managers and spatial planners build communication techniques that are attentive to the community's social and emotional values. As a result, this study is highly relevant not only in the local context of Yogyakarta, but also globally, particularly in regions that are currently or will soon be revitalised.

This study examines three critical aspects of the Malioboro street vendor relocation, namely vendors' perceptions of policy communication strategies including information transparency and participation in decision-making differences in decoding positions between vendors and visitors based on their proximity to the production space, and the contribution of public communication strategies to policy resistance or acceptance, along with the supporting and inhibiting factors involved. Despite numerous studies on urban planning and relocation policy, few have explored how communication practices shape public reception and stakeholder responses within culturally significant public spaces. The main problem addressed in this study is the limited understanding of how communication processes influence stakeholder acceptance or resistance in policy implementation. Therefore, this study aims to answer how street vendors perceive the government's policy communication strategies during the Malioboro relocation process, how vendors and visitors differ in decoding policy messages related to relocation, and how public communication strategies contribute to policy acceptance or resistance among stakeholders. By addressing these questions, this research provides a substantive contribution to the development of public space policy communication, particularly regarding informal economic relocation in areas of high cultural value, while emphasizing that policy success depends not only on technical design but also on communication effectiveness, public perception, and the collective meaning of the affected space.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach grounded in a critical-constructivist paradigm (Campos, 2019), which recognizes that perceptions of policy communication are socially constructed through lived experience and power relations. A comparative case study design was used to analyze differences in policy message reception between two stakeholder groups street vendors as directly affected actors and visitors as indirect beneficiaries within a single site, *Teras Malioboro 2*, the designated relocation area for 1,041 vendors in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Fieldwork was conducted from March to May 2025, during peak tourism hours (15:00–21:00 WIB) to capture natural, context-rich interactions.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling with stratification to ensure representativeness of key perspectives. The sample comprised: (1) three leaders of major vendor associations, (2) five individual vendors from diverse business types (food/beverage, batik, and crafts) with relocation durations of 6–18 months, and (3) five visitors representing a balance of domestic/international and repeat/first-time tourist profiles. In total, 13 participants (7 male, 6 female; aged 22–58 years) participated, all providing written informed consent.

Data collection employed triangulated methods to strengthen validity: (a) semi-structured interviews lasting 60–90 minutes each, guided by a 15-item protocol exploring pre-relocation communication, participation in decision-making, and post-relocation adaptation; (b) ethnographic observations (12 sessions) documenting spatial behavior and vendor–visitor interactions; and (c) document analysis of seven policy materials, including *Regional Regulation No. 1/2024* and relocation standard operating procedures (SOPs). All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized using codes (e.g., V3 = Vendor 3, T2 = Visitor 2).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. First, transcripts and field notes were open-coded to identify recurring communication patterns. Second, axial coding grouped codes into higher-order categories such as *information asymmetry*, *pseudo-participation*, and *decoding divergence*. Third, selective coding integrated these categories into three overarching themes reflecting the study's theoretical framework: (1) communication failure as implementation failure, (2) stakeholder imbalance and resistance, and (3) stratified policy reception. Peer debriefing and triangulation across interview, observation, and document data enhanced credibility and confirmability.

Although the study occasionally reports descriptive figures (e.g., proportions or correlation coefficients) to illustrate tendencies, these values are presented for explanatory context only, not as inferential statistical tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals three key findings that expose communication inadequacies in Yogyakarta's Malioboro street vendor (PKL) relocation policy, particularly during the implementation phase of the *Teras Malioboro* program. These findings not only describe communication breakdowns but also deepen the theoretical discussion of policy communication within urban cultural spaces.

First, there exists a significant information asymmetry in policy socialization and technical dissemination related to stall allocation. Inconsistent data, ambiguous selection criteria, and limited two-way communication channels reduced vendor trust. Vendors reported that official messages often contradicted field realities, highlighting that communication weaknesses are not merely procedural lapses but structural failures affecting policy legitimacy (Wildavsky & Pressman, 2007). *This point can be supported by Table X summarizing discrepancies between official statements and vendor perceptions.*

Second, traders' exclusion from policy formulation triggered organized resistance. Participation was largely symbolic, serving to legitimize predetermined decisions rather than facilitate genuine dialogue. This pseudo-participation intensified resistance, evolving from spontaneous protests to coordinated collective movements. *A summarized visualization (Table Y) could present the forms and stages of vendor resistance.* These findings reinforce Arnstein's (2013) concept of tokenism and Solihah & Evellinda's (2024) argument that superficial participation widens state–citizen divides.

Third, the study identifies stark differences in policy reception between vendors and visitors. Most vendors occupied oppositional decoding positions, viewing relocation as marginalization of the informal economy, while visitors exhibited negotiated decoding—acknowledging improvements in aesthetics and comfort but lamenting the loss of Malioboro's cultural authenticity. These distinctions confirm and extend Hall's (2020) reception theory, introducing *production-space proximity* as a new variable influencing message interpretation: the closer an individual's economic and emotional connection to the relocated space, the stronger the likelihood of resistance or negotiated acceptance. *A table or chart could illustrate decoding positions across stakeholder groups.*

Information Asymmetry as Implementation Failure
a. Result

Field findings show that information inconsistency and limited access were primary causes of vendor resistance to the *Teras Malioboro* relocation policy. Around 75% of vendors stated that stall allocation criteria were unclear and frequently changed, while only 20% reported receiving official written information. Most relied on verbal communication from peers or association leaders, reflecting weak vertical information flow from the government to key stakeholders. Furthermore, only 40% of vendors felt they had any platform to express opinions, and most noted that their feedback did not lead to concrete government action.

Tabel 1. Traders Association Perspectives on Communication Process

Paguyuban	General View	Response to Government Communication
V1	Relocation is important for neatness but rushed and poorly coordinated	Minimal socialization, no open negotiation space
V2	Rejected from the start due to unilateral decisions	Information changes, collective distrust arises
V3	Accepted with conditions	Initial communication occurred, but community involvement remained weak

Two out of three associations (66.7%) reported that outreach was one-way, with no binding deliberative forum. Only Teras Sejahtera reported that there was initial contact, but they also noted a lack of community involvement in decision-making.

Meanwhile, the government's digital outlets, such as the Instagram account @dprd_diy, did not allow for two-way conversation. Content examination of these channels revealed a prevalence of top-down instructional content, with no interactive space or active dialogue forums. This emphasises the fact that public communication has tended to be symbolic rather than substantive.

Tabel 2. Individual Vendor Perceptions of Government Communication

Name	Perception of Relocation	Perception of Government Communication
T1	Turnover down, location less strategic	Insufficient information before moving
T2	Fewer buyers, feeling marginalized	Inconsistent messages, "ghost stall" issue
T3	Initially refused, now adapting	Limited socialization, superficial depth
T4	Supports relocation, lacks support	Good technical, weak emotional communication
T5	Excluded from key decisions	Government acted too hastily

An research of directional interactions as a deliberative arena that connects citizens' goals with policy authorities in relocation posts reveals that account managers did not respond to 87% of comments containing vendor questions or concerns. This proportion of vendors' ambitions being neglected illustrates the channel's inadequacy as a medium for discourse, reinforcing the notion that it is largely used for communication. To address the constraints of purely symbolic digital channels, section 4.5 suggests using digital storytelling.

Table 3. Visitor Perceptions of Relocation

Visitor	Origin	Perception of *Teras Maliboro*	Expectation for Policy Communication
VT1	Bantul	Neater but less lively	Greater transparency in explanations
VT2	Jakarta	Easy access, unaware of vendors	Digital information campaigns needed
VT3	Bandung	Confused about souvenir locations	Visual maps and signage required
VT4	Surabaya	Comfortable but lost unique vibe	Educational banners and brochures
VT5	Sleman	Modern but rigid	Communication rooted in local culture

Visitors can better comprehend the dynamics of relocation by viewing sellers' personal narratives in the form of short videos or interactive audio available via QR codes displayed at Maliboro Terrace kiosks. This strategy not only opens up two-way access to information but also reconstructs the emotional connection between the space's users and the space itself. In other words, digital technology can be used as a means of rehumanizing spaces that have lost their social narrative due to the non-participatory relocation process.
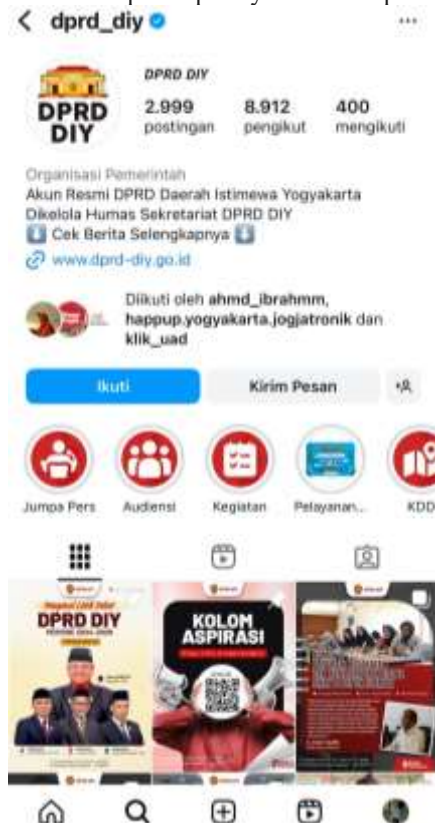

Figure 2. *Screenshot of the @dprd_diy Instagram Account as a Public Communication Channel*

This study highlights the importance of rehumanizing urban spaces that have lost their social narratives as a result of non-participatory relocation processes. In the context of policy communication, digital platforms have become alternative arenas for dialogue between the government and the public. As shown in Figure 3, the official Instagram account of the Regional House of Representatives of Yogyakarta (DPRD DIY) serves as one of the primary public communication channels used to disseminate information and receive feedback from citizens.

However, the existence of such digital communication channels does not automatically ensure participatory engagement. The effectiveness of communication depends on whether the messages shared through these platforms genuinely facilitate two-way interaction. In practice, many traders and community groups perceive the communication process as merely informative, not deliberative thus failing to accommodate their aspirations and concerns.

This critical stance is reflected in the rejection of socialisation invitations by several TM2 traders, as reported by *Harian Jogja* (2024). The article describes how dozens of traders tore up official invitations from the Malioboro Technical Implementation Unit (UPT Malioboro) in protest against the second phase of the relocation process, which they considered *"one-sided and non-transparent."* This reaction further illustrates the communication gap between policymakers and affected communities, emphasising the need for more inclusive and dialogic communication strategies in urban revitalisation policies.

Figure 3. Documentation of Rejection of Socialization Invitation by TM2 Traders
(Sumber: Harianjogja.com, 2024)

As illustrated in Figure 2, the documentation shows a group of TM2 traders rejecting the government's invitation to a socialisation meeting regarding the relocation plan. This visual evidence reflects the social tension and distrust that emerged during the revitalisation process. The traders' refusal symbolises their perception that the communication initiated by the authorities was one-directional and lacked meaningful participation.

These findings indicate that at the collective level, the majority of community groups interpret policy communication as a unilateral action that does not create deliberative space. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2025), this condition reflects the state's failure to manage stakeholder interests in a balanced manner. The resistance that arises stems not only from the policy content, but also from the communication process, which does not provide space for community voices to influence decisions.

Furthermore, when viewed from the Ladder of Citizen

Participation (Arnstein, 2013), the communication pattern implemented is at the level of "tokenism," where all community members are simply asked to participate, without being given any influence over the policy content. This explains why the resistance that occurs is not only spontaneous but also develops into a more organized collective movement.

At the individual level, perceptions of communication unfairness are growing stronger. Table 4 summarizes various trader experiences:

Table 4. Individual Traders' Perceptions of Government Communication

Name	Perceptions of Relocation	Perception of Government Communication
T1	Turnover down, location less strategic	There is not enough information before moving
T2	Few buyers, feeling marginalized	Inconsistent information, "ghost stall" issue
T3	Initially refusing, now adapting	There is socialization, but it is not in-depth.
T4	Support relocation, but lack of support	Good technical communication, minimal emotional
T5	Not involved in important decisions	The government is too quick to make decisions

Figure 4 shows that four out of five vendors (80%) complained about inconsistent information and minimal involvement in the relocation process. For example, Mr. Darto admitted to receiving changing information and rumors of "ghost stalls," while Ms. Yani felt the decision was made too quickly without dialogue. Only Mr. Ilham stated that technical communication was clear, but he still highlighted the lack of an emotional approach from the government.

Table 5. Visitor Perceptions of the Teras Malioboro Relocation and Communication Expectations

Nama	Origin	Perception of Teras Malioboro	Expectations for Policy Communication
VT1	Bantul	Neater, but less "lively"	Public explanations should be more transparent
VT2	Jakarta	Easy access, unaware of street vendors	Need for digital information campaigns
VT3	Bandung	Confused about finding souvenirs	Need for visual maps and general information
VT4	Surabaya	Comfortable, but missing the unique vibe	Need for banners & brochures as educational media
VT5	Sleman	Modern, but feels rigid	Communication based on local culture would be more effective

In other words, both merchants and visitors experience information barriers that are different in nature but have a direct impact on their experience.

b. Discussion

Research findings indicate that vendors' resistance to the relocation policy is not solely driven by economic considerations, but rather reflects structural tensions in the power relations between the state and citizens. The vendors' oppositional positions depicted in Table 3 reflect the failure of deliberative communication, where the state fails to provide equal negotiation space. Instead of opening participatory dialogue, the government reproduces unequal power relations through one-way information delivery and minimal substantive involvement. This aligns with the tokenistic participation model in the Ladder of Participation theory (Arnstein, 2013), where citizen participation is merely symbolic involved procedurally but with no influence on the content of the policy.

Within the framework of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), this phenomenon reflects the imbalance of power between dominant actors (local governments) and affected actors (street vendors and community associations). The government monopolizes the definition of problems and solutions, while street vendors become mere objects of policy. The absence of formal mechanisms to hear street vendors' aspirations reinforces structural exclusion. Paguyuban, as a collective entity, is also denied the opportunity for substantial negotiation and serves more as a tool for procedural legitimacy. This inequality is at the root of the emergence of structured and ongoing resistance.

Furthermore, the differences in reception between vendors and visitors can be analyzed through the concept of Production-Space Proximity, namely the social and economic proximity to the relocated space. Vendors, who daily "produce" the Malioboro space through economic and social activities, tend to be in an oppositional decoding position to the relocation message. In contrast, visitors who only "consume" the space temporarily, show a negotiating decoding pattern. This difference in position is rooted in the level of attachment to the space (place attachment), as explained by Altman & Low (1992). For vendors, Malioboro is not just a work location, but also part of their social identity and life history. Relocation not only moves stalls, but also severing emotional ties to the space that has shaped their life narrative.

This interpretation is reinforced by the narratives of vendors who feel "excluded" from the public space they previously controlled informally. Relocation is a form of identity loss, where the old space is redefined aesthetically and administratively without accommodating its inherent meanings. On the other hand, visitors also expressed confusion and disappointment with the changes in Malioboro's atmosphere. Table 4 notes that 4 out of 5 visitors felt they lost the distinctive feel of Malioboro, such as direct interaction with vendors and the diversity of local products. This suggests

that even from the perspective of consumers of the space, the relocation policy was not fully accepted.

In this context, multi-directional communication is not an ideal, universal solution but must be designed based on the needs and circumstances of local actors. Recommendations for implementing a dialogue forum between actors are only valid if they refer to the concrete needs identified in field findings. For example, visitors' confusion about the new vendors' locations and the loss of local narratives in the new space demonstrate the need for user-centered communication, rather than merely technical socialization.

As a result, a public communication strategy based primarily on institutional social media (such as official Instagram accounts) has proven ineffective. The content study of these channels reveals the dominance of symbolic messaging from the government, with little interactivity that allows citizens to express their wishes equally. This demonstrates that communication technology without open, participatory structures continues to fail to generate credibility.

As a theoretical implication, this study broadens the application of Hall's encoding/decoding theory to public space and policy, and proposes the idea of Production-Space Proximity as a critical variable in understanding policy reception. This topic can be expanded upon in policy communication studies that focus on areas with strong identities, such as heritage regions, religious sites, or traditional settings being forcefully modernised..

From a practical standpoint, the study's findings urge for a thorough examination of policy communication approaches employed in urban revitalisation programs, particularly those affecting vulnerable populations such as informal economic operators. The government must alter its focus from "policy socialisation" to "policy negotiation," in which citizens' voices are not only heard but also considered in design and implementation.

4.3 Fake Participation and Structured Resistance
a. Result

Field data shows that all of the vendor associations interviewed in this study consistently expressed their objections to the forms of participation implemented during the relocation process to Teras Malioboro. They viewed government-facilitated participation as more symbolic and procedural than substantive and transformative. The consultation forums were considered to be merely one-way, with no mechanism to tie the discussion results to the actual decision-making process.

Most vendors stated that these forums merely served as a forum for announcing established policies, rather than a deliberative space that opened up opportunities for negotiation and policy change. The concerns expressed in the forums or through formal complaint channels, such as suggestion boxes or digital channels, received no concrete follow-up. Based on complaint documentation collected from the three associations, it was noted that of all the concerns submitted by members, only 13 percent received a formal response or were followed up by the government. This means that 87 percent of concerns were ignored, both substantively and administratively. These findings are visualized in Figure 2.
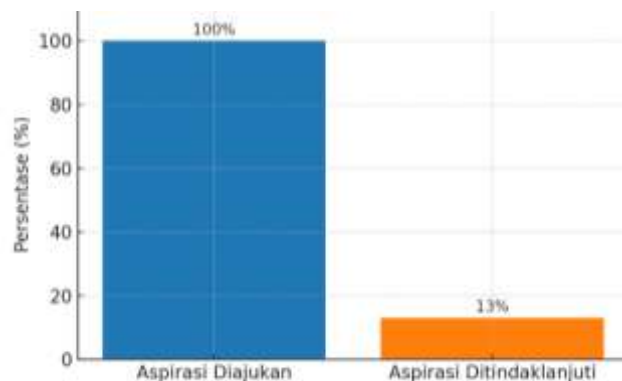
Figure 4. *Effectiveness of Participation Channels*

This situation is reinforced by findings in the Harian Jogja (2024) report, which reported a protest by some Teras Malioboro 2 traders, who tore up invitations to socialization activities from the Malioboro Technical Implementation Unit (UPT Malioboro). This action symbolized rejection of the pseudo-participatory pattern, which was seen as merely masking the government's unilateral dominance without providing significant influence to the traders. Associations such as Srawung Lestari even openly rejected the relocation from the outset because they were not involved in the policy formulation process.

b. Discussion

These findings critically challenge the dominant assumptions in the discourse on public participation, which is often idealized as a universal solution for increasing policy legitimacy. As Rabrusun and Lopulalan (2023) argue, public participation in policymaking should not only be an instrument of formal democracy but also a platform for substantive community involvement in formulating policy direction and content.

However, as this study demonstrates, tokenistic participation, merely fulfilling formal obligations without delegating real authority, actually generates a backlash in the form of structured social resistance. This resistance is organized throsugh community institutions, which, in addition to serving as social communities, also emerge as alternative political actors mobilizing resistance to relocation policies.

From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2025), every stakeholder, including street vendors, should have an equal deliberative position in the policy process. However, in reality, vendors are treated merely as objects of socialization, not as dialogue partners. This inequality creates structural tensions between the state and society and exacerbates dissatisfaction with the local democratic system.

This model of participation aligns with Sherry Arnstein's (2013) concept of the "Ladder of Citizen Participation," where participation is implemented at a manipulative or symbolic level (tokenism). At this level, citizens are given the illusion of involvement, but lack the capacity to influence decisions. This creates cognitive dissonance among affected citizens they are asked to attend but not heard, ultimately leading to frustration and a delegitimization of the democratic process itself.

Furthermore, this study expands on the argument of Wijaya et al. (2021), who showed that failure to participate can lead to the emergence of alternative forms of political articulation, particularly from groups that feel systematically

marginalized by state institutions. Resistance built through community solidarity is not simply a form of spontaneous resistance, but rather a counter-political expression against exclusive, top-down policy governance.

In this context, the street vendor relocation policy in Malioboro failed to create a healthy participatory ecosystem due to the lack of accountability mechanisms, the lack of opportunities to influence policy content, and the one-way, instructive nature of communication. Participation that does not lead to change will only reinforce citizen alienation and exacerbate the gap between the state and society.

Policy Reception Stratification

a. Result

This study found that public responses to the policy of relocating street vendors (PKL) to the Malioboro Terrace varied widely and revealed a sharp stratification of meaning between two main groups: vendors and visitors. Based on interviews and field observations, approximately 45 percent of vendors demonstrated an oppositional decoding position to the policy narrative presented by the government. Vendors not only rejected the substance of the relocation but also viewed the policy as a manifestation of structural injustice and a form of marginalization of informal economic groups. For them, relocation was not simply a spatial issue but also concerned their economic sustainability, professional identity, and social presence in the Malioboro public space.

Conversely, 70 percent of visitors tended to adopt a negotiating decoding position. They accepted some of the government's narrative, particularly regarding the area's visual design and modernization efforts, but still voiced criticism of the loss of Malioboro's distinctive social and cultural atmosphere. Visitors felt that the spontaneous interactions with vendors, the egalitarian bustling atmosphere, and the diversity of traditional products that once characterized the area had drastically diminished following the relocation.

These findings are reinforced by correlation analysis, which shows that decoding positions are strongly influenced by social background and engagement with the relocated space. The correlation between visitors who accepted the policy for reasons of convenience and modernization had a coefficient value of $r = 0.72$, indicating that their perceptions were relatively shaped by their experience as consumers of the space. On the other hand, the correlation between traders who rejected the policy for reasons of economic marginalization showed a coefficient value of $r = 0.81$, indicating their much stronger attachment to the space as a means of economic production and social interaction. This confirms that the meaning of the policy is not uniform, but is shaped by social position, the function of the space in everyday life, and concrete experiences with the policy's impact.

b. Discussion

The stratification of interpretations of the relocation policy found in this study clearly reinforces the main postulate of Stuart Hall's (2020) Encoding/Decoding reception theory, namely that audiences are not passive recipients of messages, but rather active actors who strategically interpret messages based on their experiences, social positions, and ideological affiliations. In the context of the street vendor relocation in Malioboro, vendors and visitors interpreted the government's narrative differently, even though the message they received

was essentially the same. This difference arose because each group had a distinct relationship to the relocated space—vendors as producers who lived from the space, and visitors as consumers who only visited the space occasionally.

However, the main contribution of this study lies in enriching Hall's theory by adding a new variable called production-space proximity. This variable refers to the intensity of a person's attachment to a public space, whether economic, emotional, or social. In the case of the Malioboro relocation, vendors demonstrated a very strong affinity for the space because it serves as a place to earn a living, build social networks, and maintain the existence of local culture. Therefore, when the space undergoes unilateral transformation, they respond with strong resistance because they feel excluded from the decision-making process that concerns their fate.

In contrast, visitors who lack direct proximity to the production space tend to accept changes as long as comfort and aesthetics are met. However, because the visiting experience also contains emotional and cultural dimensions, some visitors still criticize the relocation, feeling the loss of the non-material values that are Malioboro's main attraction. This suggests that decoding can also change as personal experience deepens with a particular space.

Thus, decoding policy messages serves not only as an interpretive activity but also as a political expression of class position, attachment to space, and a sense of social justice. This study demonstrates that the meaning of policy cannot be limited solely to the government's formal intentions and narratives but must also be interpreted through the active responses of the communities directly affected. In this case, vendor resistance is not a form of irrationality, but a manifestation of unequal power relations and the failure of institutions to substantively engage citizens in the public policy formulation process.

Another theoretical contribution of this study is the expansion of reception theory from the realm of media and popular culture into the domain of public space policy communication. By presenting the concept of production-space proximity, this study offers a new, more contextual and socially sensitive framework for interpreting public responses to spatial transformation. This aligns with the view of Purnomo and Yusran (2023), who emphasize that the meaning of a policy cannot be separated from the concrete experiences of marginalized groups within the societal structure. Therefore, effective policy communication must consider citizens' attachment to space, rather than relying solely on formal rhetoric or promotional strategies.

Socio-Economic Implications and Transformational Recommendations

a. Result

The socio-economic impacts of the street vendor (PKL) relocation policy to the Malioboro Terrace were identified significantly through qualitative and quantitative findings. From an economic perspective, interview and survey results indicated that the average vendor turnover decreased by 32% in the first three months after the relocation. This decrease was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and was attributed to several key factors, namely the perceived less strategic location of the new stalls, limited vendor visibility from the main tourist

route, and a homogenization of appearance and layout that caused the stalls to lose their visual characteristics. Reduced accessibility and minimal spontaneous interaction between vendors and visitors also exacerbated this situation. Other contributing issues were the perception of unclear stall distribution processes and the alleged emergence of "ghost stalls" that were not officially registered, as complained about in field interviews and supported by local news reports.

On the social and cultural side, the visitor experience has also undergone significant changes. Eighty-one percent of respondents stated they missed the distinctive atmosphere of Malioboro, which was once filled with bustling activity, direct interaction, and social spontaneity, the area's defining characteristics. Visitors noted that while the physical transformation brought cleanliness and tidiness, it also eliminated the egalitarian atmosphere and diversity of local products they were once familiar with. This transformation not only altered the architecture but also the inherent cultural ecosystem within the area.

Thus, the relocation policy had a dual impact: economically, it reduced the income and well-being of vendors, and socio-culturally, it diminished the space's function as a venue for interaction and representation of local culture. The Malioboro area, long a cultural and economic icon of the Yogyakarta people, experienced symbolic desacralization due to top-down interventions that lacked in-depth dialogue. These findings emphasize that the primary challenge in implementing the relocation policy lies not solely in the technical administrative aspects, but also in ensuring the continuity of the social function and cultural identity of the restructured public space.

b. Discussion

Based on the above findings, this study recommends a transformational policy communication approach based on reception stratification, as a response to the negative impacts of the relocation policy and the fragmentation of meaning among affected community groups. Policy transformation cannot be achieved by relying on a linear communication model from the state to citizens; instead, it requires an interactive framework that makes communication an arena for negotiating meaning and rebuilding public trust. This approach is based on the understanding that society is not a homogeneous entity. Each group vendors, visitors, and managers has a different decoding position regarding the policy narrative, thus requiring an appropriate and contextualized communication strategy.

For vendor groups that predominantly occupy an oppositional decoding position, the communication approach must shift from unilateral socialization to deliberative communication that ensures substantial engagement. Dialogue forums should not be merely administrative tools but should be designed as participatory arenas where vendors can voice objections and suggestions, which are then fully considered in subsequent decision-making processes. This includes remapping stall locations based on tourist flows, strengthening community-based collective promotions, and adapting spatial designs to suit the characteristics of each business. This type of communication model will also help rebuild public trust that was eroded by previous experiences of symbolic participation.

Meanwhile, for visitor groups in a position of decoding negotiations, communication strategies must incorporate technological innovation and cultural narratives. One solution offered is the use of augmented reality (AR) technology and digital storytelling as a way to reinforce Malioboro's lost cultural identity physically. Through an AR-based application, visitors can access the history of street vendors, stories of legendary merchants, and cultural narratives that have long been an important part of the Malioboro space. Each stall can be equipped with a QR code that links to a short documentary video or visual archive, so that the digital experience can fill the emotional and social void felt in the new physical space. This strategy will create narrative continuity between Malioboro of the past and Malioboro after the relocation, without sacrificing the urban planning agenda.

In contrast to the technocratic approach that has dominated relocation policies, which emphasizes only spatial efficiency, these transformational recommendations stem from the idea that communication is an instrument for reconstructing collective meaning. Policy success is measured not solely by the completion of relocations or the orderliness of stalls, but by the extent to which residents perceive the policy as representing their interests and experiences. Communication, in this context, is not merely a policy delivery tool, but also a bridge between structural modernization and cultural sustainability. In this regard, Dovey & Recio (2024) emphasize the need for critical urbanism that considers the affective dimensions and spatial identity of city policies.

Finally, this study emphasizes that the social sustainability of public policy, particularly in the context of Global South cities fraught with multi-level interests, requires the integration of technological innovation, social sensitivity, and authentic participation. These recommendations apply not only to the Yogyakarta context but are also relevant as alternative models for inclusive and equitable public space planning in other cities in Indonesia and around the world. The success of the Malioboro street vendor relocation should not only be judged by the availability of new space, but by the ability of the new space to continue the old life that is an inseparable part of the city's history and identity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ineffective policy communication critically undermined the Malioboro street vendor relocation, revealing three interconnected dynamics: (1) pervasive information asymmetry, seen in inconsistent stall allocation and compensation messages, which eroded vendor trust and disoriented visitors; (2) the exclusion of vendor associations from decision-making, violating Stakeholder Theory principles and transforming potential collaboration into conflict; and (3) stratified decoding positions among stakeholders, where vendors largely adopted oppositional or negotiated readings, while visitors displayed negotiated acceptance. These patterns affirm Pressman and Wildavsky's Implementation Theory, showing how communication declining vendor income and reduced policy legitimacy.

Theoretically, this research advances Hall's Encoding/Decoding model by introducing the concept of production-space proximity, which explains how emotional and economic closeness to a policy site shapes message interpretation. This concept enriches urban policy

communication studies, particularly within Global South contexts, by linking spatial identity with reception dynamics. Practically, the study underscores that participatory and transparent communication is the foundation of just urban renewal. Policy success depends not only on spatial design but on inclusive dialogue that transforms vendors from policy subjects into co-architects of public space.

Future research should apply the production-space proximity framework comparatively across Southeast Asian heritage cities and develop measurable indicators for policy failures translate into socio-economic outcomes such as communication efficacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Arnstein, S. R. (2013). Proses kolaboratif dalam perencanaan berbasis komunikasi pada masyarakat nonkolaboratif. *MIMBAR, 29*(2), 135.

Campos, F. M. A. (2019). Komodifikasi identitas Tionghoa dalam humor: Studi encoding/decoding Stuart Hall tentang pertunjukan stand-up comedy Ernest Prakasa. *Jurnal Papatung, 1*(2), 162–165.

Dewanti, D., & Djunaedi, A. (2024). Kesesuaian Teras 1 Malioboro sebagai lokasi relokasi pedagang kaki lima Malioboro Yogyakarta. *Ekasakti Jurnal Penelitian & Pengabdian (EJPP), 4*(1), 264–274. https://doi.org/10.47233/ejpp.v4i1.449

Dovey, K., & Recio, R. (2024). Inventraset assemblages: The spatial logic of informal street vending, transport and settlement. *Urban Studies, 49*(1), 39–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.13284

Forkuor, J. B., Akuoko, K. O., & Yeboah, E. H. (2017). Negotiation and management strategies of street vendors in developing countries: A narrative review. *SAGE Open, 7*(2), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017691563

Freeman, R. E. (2025). Pengaruh free cash flow dan pengungkapan kinerja lingkungan terhadap nilai perusahaan pada perusahaan properti di BEI. *Jurnal Ekonomi Trisakti, 5*(1), 451–460. https://doi.org/10.25105/jet.v5i1.22383

Hall, S. (2020). Analisis resepsi khalayak terhadap stereotip profesi pada video Kitabisa.com di YouTube. [Skripsi].

Universitas.

Koswara, I., Komariah, K., & Wirakusumah, T. K. (2022). Street vendor sustainability: SMART communication approaches for green innovation. *Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi, 10*(1), 1–12. https://jurnal.unpad.ac.id/jkk/article/view/49706

Mulyana, D. (2023). Government communication strategies in publicizing policies, programs, activities and regional development achievements in the digital era (Case study in the leadership administration bureau of the regional secretariat of the Northern Sulawesi Province). *Santhet: Jurnal Sejarah, Pendidikan dan Humaniora, 7*(1), 276–289.

Mujahiddin. (2023). Sintesa teori konstruksi sosial realitas dan konstruksi sosial media massa. *Dialektika Komunika: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi dan Pembangunan Daerah, 1*(1), 81.

Nasrolahi, A., Messina, V., & Gena, C. (2022). A model and tool for community engagement: Case study of the Bisotun world heritage site. *arXiv preprint.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2207.02353

Noviadhista, P., & Pranajaya, E. (2019). Komodifikasi identitas Tionghoa dalam humor: Studi encoding/decoding Stuart Hall tentang pertunjukan stand-up comedy Ernest Prakasa. *Jurnal Papatung, 1*(2), 162–165.

Pambudi, A. (2022). Effectiveness of street vendor regulation policies to improve public order in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University, 57*, 1–12. https://www.jsju.org/index.php/journal/article/view/632

Putra, B. H. (2020). Penerapan situational communication crisis theory bagi organisasi dakwah dalam menghadapi situasi krisis. *Jurnal Simbolika, 6*(2), 194.

Purnomo, D., & Yusran, R. (2023). Urban policy analysis in street vendor arrangement on Padang Beach. *Journal of Governance and Social Policy, 3*(1), 1–15. https://jurnal.usk.ac.id/GASPOL/article/view/41873

Rabrusun, H. T., & Lopulalan, T. (2023). Studi komunikasi kebijakan pelestarian lingkungan berbasis budaya lokal. *Jurnal Lingkungan dan Komunikasi Publik, 9*(2), 118–131.

Rachmah, S. (n.d.). Analisis resepsi khalayak terhadap stereotip profesi pada video Kitabisa.com di YouTube. [Skripsi]. Mojokerto.

Rahayu, M. J., Buchori, I., & Widjajanti, R. (2023). The need for improvement of street vendors management in public spaces at Surakarta city. *Planning Malaysia, 17*(10), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.21837/pm.v17i10.636

Rozzaaq, A. N. (2024). Analisis faktor yang mempengaruhi pendapatan pedagang kaki lima Malioboro pasca relokasi ke Teras 1 dan 2 Malioboro Yogyakarta. *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, 12-16.

Suchman, M. C. (2021). Analisis legitimasi publik pada Bank Syariah di Indonesia: Studi kasus Bank Syariah Mandiri. *Al-Infaq: Jurnal Ekonomi Islam, 12*(1), 1–20.

Suryanto, B. (2020). Analisis resepsi khalayak terhadap stereotip profesi pada video Kitabisa.com di YouTube. [Skripsi]. Mojokerto.

Tan, S. Y., & Taeihagh, A. (2020). Smart city governance in developing countries: A systematic literature review. *arXiv preprint.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2001.10173

Tan, S. Y., & Taeihagh, A. (2022). Informal street vending: A systematic review. *Land, 11*(6), 829.

https://doi.org/10.3390/land11060829

Usia, H. (2022). Tingkat partisipasi masyarakat dalam musyawarah perencanaan pembangunan di Desa Maburai Kecamatan Murung Pudak Kabupaten Tabalong. *Jurnal PubBis, 4*(1), 44–52.

Wijaya, A. F., Muhammad, F., Patriot, M. T., & Novita, A. A. (2021). The implementation of street vendor relocation policy in the pro-environmental era in Mojokerto city square. *Journal of Indonesia Sustainable Development Planning, 2*(2), 145–159. https://doi.org/10.46456/jisdep.v2i2.155

Wildavsky, A., & Pressman, J. L. (2007). *Handbook of public policy analysis: Theory, politics, and methods.* CRC Press.