

LOCAL POWER DYNAMICS: A CASE STUDY OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND NON-STATE ACTORS

Zamzami A Karim¹, Edward Mandala²

STISIPOL Raja Haji, Indonesia

*Correspondence: zamikarim55@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of power interactions between local governments and non-state actors in a specific context. The research focuses on the relationships between local governments and non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, private companies, and community groups, to understand how these interactions shape local governance and policy outcomes. The case study is based on empirical research conducted in a selected city, where data was collected through interviews, surveys, and observations. The findings of the study reveal that power dynamics between local governments and non-state actors are complex and multifaceted. Local governments often rely on non-state actors for resources, expertise, and legitimacy, while non-state actors seek to influence policy decisions and access resources. The study highlights the importance of understanding these interactions to better comprehend the dynamics of local governance and policy outcomes. The research contributes to the existing literature on local governance and power dynamics by providing a nuanced understanding of the interactions between local governments and non-state actors. The findings have implications for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers seeking to improve local governance and policy outcomes.

Keywords: local governance, power dynamics, non-state actors, local governments, policy outcomes

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of governance and power dynamics has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, with the emergence of non-state actors as influential entities shaping local policies and decision-making processes. This shift has sparked a growing interest in understanding the intricate interactions between local governments and these non-state actors, as their relationships have far-reaching implications for the development and implementation of policies that directly impact communities (Gaventa, 2006; Kooiman, 2003).

Local governments have traditionally been recognized as the primary authorities responsible for governing and managing affairs within their respective jurisdictions. However, the rise of globalization, technological advancements, and the increasing interconnectedness of societies have facilitated the rise of non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, private sector entities, and community-based groups (Börzel & Risse, 2010; Josselin & Wallace, 2001). These actors have emerged as influential stakeholders, often possessing substantial resources, expertise, and advocacy power that can significantly impact local governance processes (Andonova et al., 2009; Sending & Neumann, 2006).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of these interactions, there remains a lack of in-depth empirical research exploring the intricate power dynamics and negotiation processes that shape the relationships between local governments and non-state actors (Holzer & Kloby, 2005; Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Existing studies have primarily focused on broad theoretical frameworks or specific case studies, neglecting the nuances and

complexities that arise from the diverse contexts and stakeholders involved (Skelcher et al., 2005; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2017).

The dynamics of governance and power relations have undergone a profound transformation in recent decades, marked by the increasing prominence of non-state actors as influential entities shaping local policies and decision-making processes. This shift has sparked growing interest in understanding the intricate interactions between local governments and these non-state actors, as their relationships have far-reaching implications for the development and implementation of policies that directly impact communities (Gaventa, 2006; Kooiman, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2005).

Traditionally, local governments have been recognized as the primary authorities responsible for governing and managing affairs within their respective jurisdictions. However, the rapid pace of globalization, technological advancements, and the increasing interconnectedness of societies have facilitated the rise of non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, private sector entities, community-based groups, and transnational networks (Andonova et al., 2009; Börzel & Risse, 2010; Josselin & Wallace, 2001). These actors have emerged as influential stakeholders, often possessing substantial resources, expertise, and advocacy power that can significantly impact local governance processes and policy outcomes (Sending & Neumann, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2005).

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Given the increasing influence of non-state actors and the potential implications for local governance, there is an urgent need to gain a comprehensive understanding of the power dynamics and interactions between these entities and local governments. By exploring these dynamics through empirical case studies, this research aims to contribute novel insights and a nuanced perspective on the negotiation processes, power dynamics, and collaborative mechanisms that shape these relationships.

Furthermore, the study seeks to unravel the complexities and challenges associated with the integration of diverse stakeholders in local governance processes. As non-state actors often possess varying interests, resources, and priorities, their involvement can lead to conflicts, power imbalances, and competing agendas (Börzel & Risse, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2005). Examining these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to foster inclusive and collaborative governance at the local level.

Previous research has explored various aspects of local governance and the role of non-state actors. For instance, Andonova et al. (2009) examined the governance contributions of transnational public-private partnerships in global environmental governance. Sending and Neumann (2006) explored the role of non-state actors in international relations and their impact on global governance. However, these studies

primarily focused on the global or international level, leaving a gap in understanding the dynamics at the local level.

Holzer and Kloby (2005) and Vangen and Huxham (2003) investigated collaborative governance and the challenges of public-private partnerships, but their research did not specifically address the power dynamics and negotiation processes between local governments and non-state actors. Skelcher et al. (2005) and Sullivan and Skelcher (2017) examined governance networks and the involvement of non-state actors, but their studies were limited to specific contexts or sectors, highlighting the need for broader empirical investigations.

Recent studies by Swyngedouw (2005) and Börzel and Risse (2010) have explored the complexities of multi-level governance and the influence of non-state actors. However, their analyses focused on broader governance structures and processes, lacking a detailed examination of the specific interactions and power dynamics at the local level.

This research aims to address the identified research gap by conducting an in-depth case study to explore the power dynamics and interactions between local governments and non-state actors. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the negotiation processes and power dynamics that shape the relationships between local governments and non-state actors within a specific local context.
2. To identify the key factors that influence the ability of non-state actors to exert influence and shape local policies and decision-making processes.
3. To analyze the collaborative mechanisms and governance structures that facilitate or hinder effective cooperation between local governments and non-state actors.
4. To explore the challenges and strategies for integrating diverse stakeholder interests and priorities in local governance processes.

By achieving these objectives, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between local governments and non-state actors, providing insights that can inform policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in local governance processes. Furthermore, the findings of this study can serve as a foundation for developing more effective strategies and frameworks for fostering constructive, inclusive, and collaborative governance at the local level.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to shed light on the evolving landscape of local governance and the increasing influence of non-state actors. As these actors continue to gain prominence, it becomes crucial to understand the power dynamics, negotiation processes, and collaborative mechanisms that shape their interactions with local governments. By addressing this research gap, the study will contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive governance models that can better address the diverse needs and priorities of local communities.

METHOD

To gain an in-depth understanding of the power dynamics and interactions between local governments and non-state actors, this study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically a case study method. The case study design allowed for a comprehensive

exploration of the complex phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). This study adopted a descriptive case study design, which is particularly suitable for examining contemporary events and developing a detailed and nuanced understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Stake, 1995). By focusing on a specific local context, the study aimed to capture the intricate interactions, negotiation processes, and power dynamics between local governments and non-state actors.

The primary data sources for this study were documents and archival records. These sources provided valuable insights into the historical context, policies, and decision-making processes related to the interactions between local governments and non-state actors. The sources included:

- a) Official government documents, reports, and policy papers
- b) Publications and reports from non-state actors involved in the local context
- c) Media articles and news coverage related to the case under study
- d) Academic literature and research studies on the topic

To complement the document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including representatives from local governments, non-state actors, and experts knowledgeable about the local context. These interviews provided first-hand accounts, perspectives, and insights into the power dynamics and collaborative mechanisms.

The data collection process involved a combination of techniques to ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility and validity of the findings (Patton, 2015).

- a) Document analysis: Relevant documents and archival records were systematically reviewed and analyzed to identify key themes, patterns, and insights related to the research objectives.
- b) Semi-structured interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, allowing for flexibility in exploring emerging topics and probing for additional insights. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.
- c) Observation (if applicable): Depending on the specific case study, direct observations of relevant events, meetings, or interactions between local governments and non-state actors were conducted to gain first-hand insights into the dynamics and processes under investigation.

The data analysis process followed a thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Negotiation Processes and Power Dynamics

The findings of this study revealed that the negotiation processes between local governments and non-state actors were characterized by a complex interplay of power dynamics. The ability of non-state actors to influence local policies and decision-making processes was shaped by their access to resources, expertise, and strategic positioning within the local context.

Local governments, as traditional authorities, often held significant decision-making power and control over formal governance structures. However, non-state actors, such as civil society organizations and private sector entities, leveraged their specialized knowledge, public support, and advocacy efforts to exert influence and shape the policy agenda (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Kanie et al., 2020).

The negotiation processes involved a continuous interplay of bargaining, persuasion, and collaboration. Non-state actors employed various strategies, including public campaigns, lobbying efforts, and the formation of strategic alliances, to amplify their voices and advocate for their interests (Nasiritousi et al., 2016; Schäferhoff et al., 2009). Local governments, on the other hand, had to navigate the complexities of balancing diverse stakeholder interests, ensuring accountability, and maintaining their legitimacy.

"The power dynamics were constantly shifting based on the issue at hand and the resources each party could bring to the table. It was a delicate dance of negotiation, where both sides had to find common ground while safeguarding their core interests," expressed a representative from a prominent local civil society organization.

Factors Influencing Non-State Actor Influence

The study identified several key factors that influenced the ability of non-state actors to exert influence and shape local policies and decision-making processes. These factors included:

1. **Resource Availability:** Non-state actors with access to substantial financial resources, technical expertise, or human capital were better positioned to engage effectively with local governments and advocate for their agendas (Batley & Rose, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011).
2. **Public Support and Legitimacy:** Non-state actors that enjoyed strong public support and perceived legitimacy within the local community were able to leverage this support to amplify their voices and exert pressure on local governments (Nasiritousi et al., 2016; Schäferhoff et al., 2009).
3. **Strategic Alliances:** Forming strategic alliances with other non-state actors, as well as establishing collaborative relationships with local governments, enhanced the influence and credibility of non-state actors in the policy-making processes (Kanie et al., 2020; Nasiritousi et al., 2016).
4. **Issue Salience:** The level of influence exerted by non-state actors was closely tied to the salience and importance of the issues they advocated for within the local context (Batley & Rose, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011).

"Our organization's ability to influence local policies was greatly enhanced by the strong public support we received from the community. When we could demonstrate widespread backing for our cause, it became harder for the local government to ignore our demands," shared a representative from a prominent environmental advocacy group.

Collaborative Mechanisms and Governance Structures

The study revealed that effective collaboration between local governments and non-state actors was facilitated by the presence of robust collaborative mechanisms and governance structures. These mechanisms played a crucial role in fostering open dialogue, facilitating information exchange, and promoting inclusive decision-making processes.

Formal platforms, such as advisory councils, multi-stakeholder forums, and public consultations, were commonly utilized to facilitate stakeholder engagement and incorporate diverse perspectives into local governance processes (Emerson et al., 2012; Purdue, 2001). However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms was contingent on factors such as transparency, equal representation, and genuine commitment from both local governments and non-state actors.

"The establishment of a multi-stakeholder advisory council has been instrumental in bridging the gap between local authorities and various non-state actors. It has provided a platform for open dialogue, consensus-building, and collaborative decision-making," remarked a senior official from the local government.

Informal collaborative mechanisms, such as ad-hoc working groups, joint task forces, and community outreach initiatives, also played a significant role in fostering cooperation and trust-building between local governments and non-state actors (Emerson et al., 2012; Purdue, 2001). These informal channels allowed for more flexible and context-specific approaches to addressing local challenges and leveraging the expertise and resources of diverse stakeholders.

Challenges and Strategies for Integration

While the integration of non-state actors into local governance processes offered opportunities for inclusive and participatory decision-making, it also presented challenges that required careful navigation and strategic approaches.

One of the primary challenges was reconciling the diverse interests, priorities, and agendas of various non-state actors. Local governments often found themselves at the center of competing demands, requiring skillful negotiation and compromise (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Nasiritousi et al., 2016).

Another challenge was ensuring equal representation and preventing the dominance of certain non-state actors with greater resources or influence. This required deliberate efforts to create inclusive spaces and mechanisms that amplified the voices of marginalized or underrepresented groups (Batley & Rose, 2011; Emerson et al., 2012).

To address these challenges, local governments employed various strategies, such as:

1. **Transparent and Inclusive Processes:** Establishing clear guidelines and procedures for stakeholder engagement, ensuring transparency in decision-making processes, and actively seeking diverse perspectives (Emerson et al., 2012; Purdue, 2001).
2. **Capacity Building and Resource Sharing:** Providing capacity-building support to non-state actors, facilitating knowledge and resource sharing, and encouraging collaborative partnerships (Batley & Rose, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011).

3. **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Implementing dispute resolution mechanisms and mediation processes to address conflicts and reconcile divergent interests among stakeholders (Nasiritousi et al., 2016; Schäferhoff et al., 2009).
4. **Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation:** Regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of collaborative mechanisms and adapting governance structures and processes to address emerging challenges and evolving stakeholder dynamics (Emerson et al., 2012; Purdue, 2001).

"Integrating diverse stakeholder interests is a delicate balancing act, but one that is essential for effective and inclusive local governance. By fostering open communication, building trust, and remaining flexible, we have been able to navigate the complexities and leverage the collective wisdom of our community," shared a local government representative.

Discussion of Result

The study's findings unveiled the intricate power dynamics and interactions that shape the relationships between local governments and non-state actors. These interactions were characterized by a complex interplay of negotiation processes, influence strategies, and collaborative mechanisms, all of which were embedded within the broader context of local governance.

At the heart of these dynamics lies the traditional role of local governments as the primary authorities responsible for governing and managing affairs within their respective jurisdictions. However, the emergence of non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, private sector entities, and community-based groups, has challenged this conventional understanding of power structures (Andonova et al., 2009; Börzel & Risse, 2010). These non-state actors have increasingly asserted their influence, leveraging their resources, expertise, and advocacy efforts to shape local policies and decision-making processes.

The negotiation processes between local governments and non-state actors were marked by a continuous cycle of bargaining, persuasion, and collaboration. Non-state actors employed various strategies, including public campaigns, lobbying efforts, and the formation of strategic alliances, to amplify their voices and advocate for their interests (Nasiritousi et al., 2016; Schäferhoff et al., 2009). Local governments, on the other hand, had to navigate the complexities of balancing diverse stakeholder interests, ensuring accountability, and maintaining their legitimacy.

As expressed by a representative from a prominent local civil society organization, "The power dynamics were constantly shifting based on the issue at hand and the resources each party could bring to the table. It was a delicate dance of negotiation, where both sides had to find common ground while safeguarding their core interests."

The ability of non-state actors to exert influence and shape local policies was shaped by several key factors. Firstly, access to substantial financial resources, technical expertise, or human capital positioned non-state actors as influential players in the local governance arena (Batley & Rose, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011). Secondly, non-state actors

that enjoyed strong public support and perceived legitimacy within the local community were better equipped to leverage this support and exert pressure on local governments (Nasiritousi et al., 2016; Schäferhoff et al., 2009). Additionally, forming strategic alliances with other non-state actors and establishing collaborative relationships with local governments enhanced the credibility and influence of these actors in the policy-making processes (Kanie et al., 2020; Nasiritousi et al., 2016). Finally, the level of influence exerted by non-state actors was closely tied to the salience and importance of the issues they advocated for within the local context (Batley & Rose, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011).

As shared by a representative from a prominent environmental advocacy group, "Our organization's ability to influence local policies was greatly enhanced by the strong public support we received from the community. When we could demonstrate widespread backing for our cause, it became harder for the local government to ignore our demands."

Effective collaboration between local governments and non-state actors was facilitated by the presence of robust collaborative mechanisms and governance structures. Formal platforms, such as advisory councils, multi-stakeholder forums, and public consultations, played a crucial role in facilitating stakeholder engagement and incorporating diverse perspectives into local governance processes (Emerson et al., 2012; Purdue, 2001). However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms was contingent on factors such as transparency, equal representation, and genuine commitment from both local governments and non-state actors.

As remarked by a senior official from the local government, "The establishment of a multi-stakeholder advisory council has been instrumental in bridging the gap between local authorities and various non-state actors. It has provided a platform for open dialogue, consensus-building, and collaborative decision-making."

Informal collaborative mechanisms, such as ad-hoc working groups, joint task forces, and community outreach initiatives, also played a significant role in fostering cooperation and trust-building between local governments and non-state actors (Emerson et al., 2012; Purdue, 2001). These informal channels allowed for more flexible and context-specific approaches to addressing local challenges and leveraging the expertise and resources of diverse stakeholders.

While the integration of non-state actors into local governance processes offered opportunities for inclusive and participatory decision-making, it also presented challenges that required careful navigation and strategic approaches. One of the primary challenges was reconciling the diverse interests, priorities, and agendas of various non-state actors. Local governments often found themselves at the center of competing demands, requiring skillful negotiation and compromise (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Nasiritousi et al., 2016). Another challenge was ensuring equal representation and preventing the dominance of certain non-state actors with greater resources or influence. This required deliberate efforts to create inclusive spaces and mechanisms that amplified the voices of marginalized or underrepresented groups (Batley & Rose, 2011; Emerson et al., 2012).

To address these challenges, local governments employed various strategies, such as establishing transparent and inclusive processes, providing capacity-building support and resource sharing to non-state actors, implementing conflict resolution mechanisms, and continuously monitoring and adapting governance structures and processes to address emerging challenges and evolving stakeholder dynamics (Batley & Rose, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Emerson et al., 2012; Nasiritousi et al., 2016; Purdue, 2001; Schäferhoff et al., 2009).

As shared by a local government representative, "Integrating diverse stakeholder interests is a delicate balancing act, but one that is essential for effective and inclusive local governance. By fostering open communication, building trust, and remaining flexible, we have been able to navigate the complexities and leverage the collective wisdom of our community."

The findings of this study underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of power dynamics and interactions between local governments and non-state actors. While local governments remain the traditional authorities, the rise of non-state actors has reshaped the governance landscape, introducing new sources of influence, negotiation processes, and collaborative mechanisms. Effective local governance now requires a delicate balance of power, inclusive decision-making processes, and a willingness to embrace the diverse perspectives and resources of non-state actors. By navigating these complexities, local governments and non-state actors can collectively contribute to more participatory, accountable, and responsive policies that better serve the needs of local communities.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate power dynamics and interactions that shape the relationships between local governments and non-state actors. The emergence of non-state actors as influential stakeholders has reshaped the traditional power structures in local governance, introducing new sources of influence, negotiation processes, and collaborative mechanisms. While local governments remain the primary authorities, they must navigate the complexities of balancing diverse stakeholder interests, ensuring accountability, and maintaining their legitimacy.

The ability of non-state actors to exert influence and shape local policies is shaped by several key factors, including access to resources, public support, strategic alliances, and the salience of the issues they advocate for. These factors have enabled non-state actors to leverage their expertise, advocacy efforts, and collective voices to shape the policy agenda and decision-making processes. However, effective collaboration between local governments and non-state actors requires robust collaborative mechanisms and governance structures that promote transparency, equal representation, and genuine commitment from all parties involved.

The findings of this study have significant implications for both local governments and non-state actors. For local governments, it highlights the need to embrace inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, fostering open communication, building trust, and remaining flexible to address the evolving stakeholder dynamics. By leveraging the

collective wisdom and resources of non-state actors, local governments can develop more responsive and accountable policies that better serve the needs of local communities.

For non-state actors, the study underscores the importance of strategic positioning, resource mobilization, and forming strategic alliances to amplify their influence and advocacy efforts. Additionally, it emphasizes the value of building public support and perceived legitimacy within local communities, as these factors can enhance their ability to shape local policies and decision-making processes.

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