

Community Empowerment Based on Thematic Villages in Sukorejo Sub-district, Gunungpati District, Semarang City

Original Article

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the implementation of community empowerment based on thematic villages in Sukorejo Sub-district, Gunungpati District, Semarang City. The approach used is qualitative, with data collection techniques involving in-depth interviews and field observations. The research findings indicate that community empowerment in Kampung Jawi is integrated into four main aspects: human development, business development, environmental development, and institutional development. Human development is demonstrated through the strengthening of individual capacities and the active involvement of residents in educational activities based on local culture. Business development is reflected in the development of creative economic activities such as Kampung Jawi and Pasar Jaten, which involve housewives and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Environmental development is evident in the participatory physical transformation of the village to change its negative image. Meanwhile, institutional development is realised through the strategic role of Pokdarwis and collaboration with the local government. Despite facing challenges such as low initial participation, lack of economic literacy, and reliance on central figures, the thematic village programme in Kampung Jawi has successfully fostered a more empowered, self-reliant community with a strong cultural identity. These findings indicate that the thematic village model can serve as a strategic tool in sustainable and adaptive community development rooted in local wisdom.

Keywords: Community Empowerment, Local Culture, Participatory Development, Rural Development, Thematic Villages.

1. Introduction

In 2017, the poverty rate in Semarang City was recorded by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), showing that the number of poor people (those with per capita or monthly expenditure below the poverty line) reached 80,900 people (4.62%). This figure represents a decrease of 20,137 people compared to 2016, which recorded 83,600 people (4.85%). To reduce the poverty rate and improve the welfare of the people, this requires special attention from the government (Sarwono et al., 2023).

Local governments have the authority to manage and regulate their territories independently (Kinanti, 2019). To improve the welfare of the community, local governments need to make changes by addressing existing and emerging social issues within the community. In order to achieve independence in line with regional autonomy, local governments must encourage innovation and change by involving community participation, so that the policies implemented are not only top-down, but also bottom-up.

To overcome this challenge, the government has created various programmes, such as cash assistance, educational assistance for poor students, and business capital for residents in need, with the hope of reducing poverty rates. In this effort, the Semarang City Government



has initiated the 'Gerbang Hebat' (Great Gate) Program (Joint Movement for Poverty Alleviation and Management through Harmonisation of Economy, Education, Ecosystem, and Community Ethos) as stipulated in Semarang City Regulation No. 12 of 2016, which focuses on poverty alleviation in the city of Semarang. The Gerbang Hebat Program adopts an innovative approach by implementing the concept of thematic villages to empower communities and address poverty.

Community empowerment programs are a key strategy in sustainable urban development (Sujarwo et al., 2017). This approach focuses on enhancing the capacity of communities to actively participate in decision-making and the development of their own areas. Faedlulloh et al. (2019) emphasised the importance of a bottom-up approach in community empowerment. They highlighted that community participation is not only as beneficiaries, but as key agents of change in the development process. Thus, the implementation of these activities is not merely aimed at fulfilling formal obligations, but is a manifestation of the critical reflection of local communities that have developed a collective awareness of the urgency of climate change control at the village or local level.

The concept of community empowerment has been adopted in various national and regional development policies in Indonesia (Barlian & Herista, 2021; Muzakki, 2024). Based on regulations established by the local government, particularly in Semarang City, this is evident through government programmes promoting the concept of thematic villages, as stipulated in Semarang Mayor Regulation No. 22 of 2018 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Thematic Villages (Faizah et al., 2022). Thematic villages are a regional development strategy based on local potential through a specific thematic approach that reflects the identity, culture, or economic potential of the local community (Ritonga & Halim, 2025).

Thematic villages are not only a way to manage the environment, but also an opportunity for the community with economic development and social progress (Subiyakto et al., 2022). Parties involved in this programme take a holistic approach that combines the physical, economic, social and cultural elements so it can be implemented with communities themselves providing initiatives and capability as well participating all along.

Semarang, as one of Indonesia's major cities, has adopted the thematic village concept since 2016 as part of its poverty alleviation and environmental quality improvement strategy. According to data from the Semarang City Planning Agency (Bappeda) (2023), by 2023, 269 thematic villages had been established across 16 sub-districts and 177 neighbourhoods in Semarang City. This programme aims to develop local potential, strengthen social cohesion, and improve community welfare through empowerment based on the unique characteristics of each area.

Currently, there are many thematic villages that have become local tourist attractions in Semarang City, thereby contributing to the local economy of the community in those areas. One of them is Kampung Jawi, located in Kalialang Lama, RT 02 RW 01, Sukorejo Sub-district, Gunungpati District, Semarang City. In November 2016, Kalialang was officially announced by the Semarang City Government as one of the thematic villages with the theme of a Javanese cultural tourism village, named Kampung Jawi.

Kampung Jawi is a successful example of a thematic village that leverages local cultural values as the foundation for community empowerment (Farras et al., 2019). Established in 2016, Kampung Jawi centres on the preservation of Javanese culture as its core identity. The uniqueness of Kampung Jawi lies in the integration of cultural aspects with local economic development and environmental improvement (Suminar et al., 2023), making it a holistic model of a thematic village that develops all aspects, including social, economic, cultural,

environmental, infrastructure, and regional potential, with the aim of creating a thematic village with strong and sustainable characteristics and bringing numerous benefits to all communities (Basori et al., 2021).

In the context of sustainable development, thematic villages like Kampung Jawi play a strategic role in realising an inclusive and resilient city. Feritrianti et al. (2022) argues that thematic villages are not only a medium for preserving local cultural values, but also serve as drivers of social and economic transformation at the community level. This approach, based on local wisdom, encourages direct and sustainable community empowerment and creates participatory spaces for addressing urban challenges such as poverty and environmental degradation (Saputri, 2019).

In its development, thematic villages also face various challenges that need to be addressed to ensure their sustainability. One of the main obstacles is the dependence on top-down initial initiatives without strong grassroots sustainability mechanisms. Research by Martuti et al. (2021) note that many thematic village programmes have stagnated due to a lack of long-term budgetary support, weak community participation, and a lack of sustainable cross-sectoral coordination. Other challenges include low community awareness of the importance of preserving local identity as an asset for development, as well as the suboptimal institutional capacity of residents to independently manage the potential of their villages.

Community empowerment through thematic village programmes is not only a development strategy based on local potential, but also a form of implementation of regional legal policies (Widhiastuti et al., 2022). Within the framework of regional autonomy as regulated in Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, local governments have the authority to establish policies that are adaptive to community needs. In Semarang City, this policy is concretised through Semarang City Regulation No. 12 of 2016 and Semarang Mayor Regulation No. 22 of 2018, which technically regulate the implementation of thematic villages. However, in its implementation, various legal issues have emerged, such as weak local institutional capacity, inconsistencies between legal norms and practices, and the absence of regular legal oversight and evaluation mechanisms. Through a development law approach and responsive law theory, this article aims to analyse how the law can support substantive and sustainable community empowerment. The main focus of this study is on the effectiveness and challenges of regional legal instruments in the implementation of thematic village programmes in Sukorejo Sub-district, Gunungpati District, Semarang City. Based on this background, this study will focus on how community empowerment based on thematic villages is carried out in Sukorejo Sub-district, Gunungpati District, Semarang City.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Community Empowerment

Mardikanto and Soebianto explain that empowerment is a series of efforts aimed at improving and maximising the capacity and competitiveness of vulnerable community groups, including individuals living in poverty (Totok & Poerwoko, 2017). Meanwhile, Sarwono et al. (2023) define empowerment etymologically as originating from the root word 'daya,' which means strength or ability. Based on this definition, empowerment can be understood as a process of becoming empowered, gaining strength, or as a form of transferring strength from those who already have power to those who are still weak or lack sufficient power.

The community is both the subject and object in the empowerment process. The community itself plays the main role as both the actor and the determinant of the direction of development, where those who are included in vulnerable or underprivileged groups become

the main targets for capacity building. In this context, the community is not only positioned as a beneficiary, but also as an active actor that gradually acquires the ability, independence, and strength to manage and improve its quality of life in a sustainable manner (Katuuk et al., 2023).

In Totok and Poerwoko (2017), community empowerment is a participatory process in which communities are given the trust and opportunity to identify key development issues they face, as well as to design appropriate solutions or activities to address them. The results of this process can then be used as a basis for formulating programmes at the local, regional and national levels.

Based on the above explanation, community empowerment is a process that aims to build independence and strengthen the capacity of communities, especially vulnerable groups, to be able to recognise, plan and overcome the development issues they face themselves. This process places the community as the main actor that not only receives benefits but is also actively involved in every stage of development. Through a participatory approach, communities are given the space to voice their needs, explore their potential, and formulate solutions that are appropriate to their local context. Thus, community empowerment is not merely an external intervention, but a collaborative effort that encourages social transformation from within, towards a more independent, competitive, and sustainable life.

2.2. The Theory of Community Empowerment

Empowerment is essentially a process of providing, developing, or optimising the potential of a community. This potential encompasses two main dimensions: the ability and courage to act, and the power or bargaining position to determine the direction of life and development in their environment. However, in practice, empowerment efforts undertaken by various parties are often limited to economic aspects. The primary focus is usually on poverty alleviation through economic approaches alone. As a result, community empowerment activities tend to be directed toward the development of productive enterprises aimed at increasing income, without addressing the social, political, or cultural dimensions that are also important in building the overall independence of communities.

In line with this, Totok and Poerwoko (2017) formulated the concept of community empowerment, which is known as a strategic approach that encompasses three main pillars. These three pillars are important foundations in creating an empowered and independent community. The following are the three pillars and their explanations:

1. Human Development, which focuses on improving the quality of individuals through education, training, and character building so that the community has the skills, knowledge, and confidence to face life's challenges.
2. Business Development, aimed at developing productive economic activities, such as micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), to increase income and improve the well-being of the community.
3. Environmental Development, emphasising the preservation and sustainable management of the environment as a support for community life.

However, Totok and Poerwoko (2017), see that these three aspects cannot stand alone and require a strong support system in order to run synergistically and sustainably. Therefore, he added an important element, namely Institutional Development, which refers to strengthening the role and function of institutions at the community level, both formal and informal, as drivers, managers, and guardians of the sustainability of empowerment programmes. The institutions referred to include community organisations, business groups, traditional institutions, and local government institutions that act as facilitators.

Thus, the presence of Institutional Development is key to ensuring the integration and effectiveness of the implementation of Tri Bina. Without strong and adaptive institutional support, the three elements of empowerment risk not functioning optimally or even failing to achieve their objectives. Therefore, in the context of community-based development, these four aspects must be designed in an integrated manner in order to create a community that is not only empowered individually and economically, but also capable of protecting the environment and building a strong and sustainable social system.

2.3. Community Empowerment in Thematic Villages

Community empowerment in thematic villages is a concrete form of community-based development that prioritises the active role of residents in identifying local potential, formulating development strategies, and managing resources independently and sustainably. Thematic villages are essentially initiatives for environmental management and socio-economic empowerment of communities based on specific themes, such as arts and culture, educational tourism, green environment, urban agriculture, or local cuisine. The thematic village approach is not merely about beautifying the area, but more than that, it places the community as the main actor in development. The empowerment process includes various aspects such as capacity building, entrepreneurship training, strengthening local institutions, and managing village assets and potential relevant to the theme being promoted.

As noted by Faedlulloh et al. (2019), the success of thematic villages depends heavily on the level of community participation, not only in the implementation stage, but from the planning stage to the evaluation stage. When residents are fully and equally involved, the empowerment process becomes more meaningful and sustainable. This aligns with the perspective of Totok and Poerwoko (2017), which emphasises the importance of empowerment as a process of fostering self-reliance within the community, rather than merely external assistance. In practice, thematic villages often serve as a platform for cross-sectoral collaboration between the community, government, universities, and the private sector. This collaboration strengthens social capital and opens access to resources, such as training, marketing, and funding. One of the most common forms of empowerment is the strengthening of local-based MSMEs, the development of village tourism, and community-based environmental conservation.

However, the success of empowerment in thematic villages is not without challenges, such as resistance to change, information inequality, the dominance of local elites, or symbolic participation. Therefore, it is important to build strong local institutions (Institutional Development) so that all initiatives can be managed fairly, transparently, and sustainably. With the right approach, thematic villages are not only a tool for environmental management or regional branding, but also a strategic space for social transformation, a place where communities grow as development actors who are aware of the potential, identity, and future of their villages.

3. Research Method

This study uses qualitative methods to explore in depth the understanding of community empowerment based on thematic villages, particularly in Kampung Jawi. Qualitative methods were chosen because this study aims to understand the empowerment programme through the perspectives of residents and village administrators. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data collected to describe in depth the practice of community empowerment in Kampung Jawi. Primary data was obtained directly from field interactions conducted through in-depth interviews with the Kampung Jawi Tourism Working Group, the

Head of the Neighbourhood Unit, and Kampung Jawi residents. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various relevant documents, sub-district profiles, local government regulations or policies related to community empowerment programmes, as well as academic literature from journals, books, and previous research discussing community empowerment and thematic village development. By combining primary and secondary data analysis, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Community Empowerment Based on Thematic Villages in Sukorejo Sub-district.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Early History of the Formation of Kampung Jawi

Kampung Jawi in Sukorejo Sub-district, Gunungpati District, was not originally a tourist destination. The area was known as an ordinary neighbourhood with minimal development and often stigmatised by outsiders. It was often considered a slum, poor and prone to disasters, although this was not always the case. It was this negative image that prompted a community leader, who is now the head of Pokdarwis, to make changes. This drive was not only based on a desire to preserve culture, but also on a desire to improve the community's view of the area where they lived.

However, the transformation process was not easy. When the plan to turn the village into a cultural tourist destination began to be socialised, the majority of the community was passive and sceptical. Some residents even considered the idea unrealistic. Socialisation activities had to be carried out repeatedly, but only a small number of residents attended. The main obstacle was not direct rejection, but rather low development literacy, a lack of confidence, and a lack of experience in managing tourism-based communities. To overcome these obstacles, the initiator relied on a local value-based approach. Instead of using a top-down approach, they chose a cultural and emotional approach by inviting residents to participate in community service and small activities that fostered a spirit of mutual cooperation. This approach proved to be more effective because it addressed the root cause of the participation problem, namely the lack of a sense of belonging to the area.

The process of change began to be visible when the village environment was reorganised, such as the creation of murals, the construction of a cultural hall, and public spaces began to be filled with Javanese ornaments. In a short period of time, the village underwent not only physical but also social changes. Residents began to get involved in cultural activities, MSME training, and other economic activities such as bazaars and folk markets. The village's identity began to take shape collectively, no longer just as a place to live, but as a space for cultural and economic expression for the local community. The transformation of Kampung Jawi into a thematic village was not solely the result of government intervention, but rather the fruit of organised community initiatives focused on local values. These initiatives were later recognised by the Semarang City Government through the thematic village programme, which strengthened its existence as a model for community empowerment based on culture.

4.2. Community Empowerment in Kampung Jawi

Based on the results of the writing, it can be seen that the implementation of community empowerment, the Jawi Thematic Village in Sukorejo Subdistrict, Gunungpati District, Semarang City must pay attention to the main community empowerment efforts proposed by (Totok & Poerwoko, 2017), which are as follows:

A. Human Development

Based on research on human development implementation, it was found that the government's efforts to improve individual capacity are still not optimal. The lack of community participation is the main challenge, indicating low awareness and motivation among residents to participate in training activities or programmes aimed at improving the quality of life organised by the government. However, this aspect is crucial because quality human resources are the foundation for the development of thematic villages. The human development aspect in Mardikanto's theory refers to increasing the capacity of individuals and communities to be able to play an active role in the development process in a conscious, independent, and sustainable manner. In Kampung Jawi, the concrete form of human development is reflected in the educational efforts and strengthening of cultural values carried out by local activists, particularly the head of Pokdarwis. An interview with the head of POKDARWIS Kampung Jawi stated that,

“The initiation of the empowerment programme did not only start from the government, but arose from my awareness to promote culture so that it would not be marginalised and eroded by increasingly modern times” (interview with Siswanto as the head of POKDARWIS Kampung Jawi).

This awareness is then manifested in educational activities such as Javanese language training, karawitan art, wayang performances, and teaching local wisdom values. Community participation, especially among the younger generation, is the focus of attention. The Pokdarwis chairperson actively encourages teenagers to learn to play the rebana and karawitan as a strategy to foster involvement while instilling a love for culture.

The chairman of the Kampung Jawi Tourism Community Organisation stated that *“The participation of women is also strengthened through the organisation of community-based economic activities. In 2018, Pasar Jaten, a community-based tourist market, was established in response to residents' desire to participate in local economic activities.”* (Interview with Siswanto, Chairman of POKDARWIS Kampung Jawi) There are other activities organised by the Chairman of Pokdarwis with the aim of involving women who 'enjoy cooking and selling snacks' to sell traditional foods. This not only improves the skills and income of residents, but also builds the confidence and social role of women at the community level.

However, community participation was not formed instantly. Based on interviews, there are significant challenges in encouraging community members to actively participate, especially in the early stages of establishing Kampung Jawi as a thematic village. For example, when the village development plan was socialised, the community's response tended to be passive. The head of Pokdarwis explained:

“I sent out more than 75 invitations, but only a handful of people came. Many did not attend, without even confirming. I invited them three times, but only the same people came. They felt they already understood, when in fact they did not. Human resources are still low, so the approach must be slow and use a heartfelt approach.” (Interview, Siswanto, Head of Pokdarwis Kampung Jawi)

When community service activities were carried out, only a small portion of residents participated. Most residents withdrew because they viewed village transformation as unrealistic. This situation indicates that participatory education must be conducted

repeatedly, gradually, and culturally grounded. Emotional and cultural approaches are key to building trust and fostering voluntary resident participation. However, in the end, the residents who remained and were willing to participate in village activities became pioneers of participation. They actively engaged in managing cultural activities, environmental cleanliness, and the implementation of local festivals. This collective awareness was formed through a lengthy process and driven by consistent, adaptive, and communicative community leadership. From an empowerment perspective, the participation model in Kampung Jawi reflects a strong bottom-up approach. Residents are not merely objects of development, but active subjects who shape programmes, implement them, and maintain them together. Human empowerment here is not merely a transfer of knowledge, but a transformation of consciousness from passive to collective and empowered.

B. Business Development

Business development in the Jawi Thematic Village in Sukorejo Subdistrict, Gunungpati District, Semarang City, based on the results of empowerment activities in the productive economic sector, still faces various obstacles. The government is deemed to have not fully provided the necessary infrastructure and facilities to support community business activities, such as entrepreneurship training, access to capital, and business incubation. Additionally, the lack of development in partnership networks makes it difficult for local products to penetrate broader target markets. This has led to economic stagnation among residents, which should have grown alongside the spirit of the thematic village as a driver of local economic development.

Based on interviews with the head of Pokdarwis, economic empowerment efforts began with concerns about the lack of economic opportunities for residents, especially women. He initiated the establishment of Kampung Jawi, a people's market or *angkringan* with a Javanese cultural tourism concept. Kampung Jawi was designed not only for buying and selling, but also as a medium for promoting culture, traditional cuisine, and local MSMEs. This activity has become a catalyst for improving the economic capacity of residents through a culture-based approach. The Pokdarwis Chairperson directly encouraged residents to participate:

“I gathered the women and said, ‘If you enjoy cooking, then cook; if you enjoy selling snacks, then let’s sell them. I will invite the Mayor’” (interview with Siswanto, POKDARWIS Kampung Jawi).

This participation primarily comes from housewives, who are empowered to sell various traditional Javanese dishes such as *jenang*, market snacks, and other local delicacies. However, the implementation of Kampung Jawi is not without challenges. The Pokdarwis chairman explained that many residents are unfamiliar with modern market management systems, particularly profit-sharing schemes or revenue-sharing systems. This has led to miscommunication between managers and business operators. Some residents view the system as a form of ‘profit cutting’ because they are not accustomed to collective work distribution in the context of a tourist market.

Furthermore, the market is managed entirely by residents on a voluntary basis, without a formal business organisational structure. Although this activity receives support from the Tourism Office and tourism community networks, there is no structured business management training system to strengthen the entrepreneurial capacity of residents. This shows that community participation in business development has emerged enthusiastically at the practical level, but there is still minimal assistance in strengthening the system.

Nevertheless, Kampung Jawi remains a symbol of a successful culture-based local economic transformation that attracts visitors from inside and outside the city by introducing the products of Sukorejo residents and providing a tradition-based economic experience. Additionally, Kampung Jawi has successfully changed negative stigmas and enhanced the social value and existence of the village in the public eye.

Community participation in business development takes two forms: 1) Direct participation in business activities such as selling products, setting up stalls, and preparing cultural performances. 2) Cultural participation in the form of involvement in the preservation of traditional cuisine, clothing, and ornaments that are inherent in economic activities, making the business part of the cultural narrative.

Based on the results of interviews, the level of participation is still centred on key figures, while most other residents are not yet fully involved in production or management. This shows the importance of strengthening business institutions and training so that economic activities that are already underway are not only temporary but become part of the community's sustainable daily economy. The empowerment programme through business development in Kampung Jawi has succeeded in opening up space for community participation, especially women, in culture-based local economic activities. Although it still faces challenges in business literacy and market management, the Kampung Jawi model is initial evidence that communities are capable of building participatory and contextual business spaces with their local identities.

Table 1. Dynamics of Kampung Jawi Community Participation in Various Stages of Empowerment Activities

Activity Stages	Initial Participation	Participation After Assistance	Description
Socialisation of Thematic Villages	Low Only a handful of residents attended out of approximately 75 invitations sent out	Gradually increasing More residents are starting to attend	Socialisation was repeated three times; personal and cultural approaches proved to be more effective.
Community Service and Environmental Management	Minimal, dominated by initiators and early supporters	Moderate, Youth organisation and resident involvement is increasing collectively	Many residents were initially sceptical, but became active after seeing visual changes in the village.
Economic Activities (Jaten Market and Kampung Jawi)	High, great enthusiasm at the initial launch, especially among women MSME entrepreneurs	Fluctuating, Stable after supporting cultural events	There is still confusion among residents regarding the profit-sharing system; further education is needed.
Cultural Activities (Wayang, Karawitan)	Initially only as spectators, limited participation	Active, Teenagers are starting to get involved as cultural actors	Informal training builds confidence and love for local culture.

Source: Interview with the head of POKDARWIS, compiled by the author

C. Community Development

Interviews with the head of the Kampung Jawi Tourism Working Group revealed that environmental transformation was the starting point for building collective spirit among residents. Before becoming a thematic village, the Kalialang area, where Kampung Jawi is located, had a poor image among outsiders, often being associated with poverty, landslides

and marginalisation. Therefore, environmental change was positioned not merely as aesthetics, but as a strategy to ‘change the image of the area’.

“I want to change this village, from what was once called dirty and slummy, into a place that people want to come to, so I started with culture and the environment,” said Siswanto, Head of Pokdarwis.

The initial process of environmental change began with community service activities with residents. The Pokdarwis Chairman distributed over 70 invitations to encourage residents to participate in village clean-up activities, painting, and the arrangement of public facilities. However, initial participation rates were very low. Some residents did not show up, even without confirmation. This challenge did not deter the village leaders, who continued to repeat their approach through verbal invitations, door-to-door visits, and building trust through concrete examples of activities.

Environmental changes were also implemented through the construction of a cultural pavilion, which became the centre of community activities, replacing the previous practice of holding events in front of private homes. This pavilion serves as a shared space supporting artistic activities, community meetings, religious gatherings, and as a thematic village information centre. Environmental arrangement was further supported by the presence of cultural ornamental elements such as Javanese gates, ornamental plants, and Javanese-language signboards, all of which reinforce the village’s visual identity as a cultural village. Beyond physical aspects, environmental development in Kampung Jawi also encompasses the creation of a healthy and empowered social environment. This is evident in the efforts of the Pokdarwis Chairman to foster a culture of mutual assistance and respect among residents. These changes demonstrate that residents who were initially sceptical are gradually beginning to accept the concept of a thematic village after witnessing tangible changes in their own environment.

Environmental development has proven to be an effective catalyst for fostering pride, a sense of ownership, and community participation in empowerment programmes. The empowerment programme through environmental development in Kampung Jawi demonstrates that physical planning and strengthening cultural identity can serve as entry points for building collective community awareness. Despite initial challenges in participation, a gradual, culture-based approach has proven effective in transforming the image of the area while boosting residents' enthusiasm for sustainably maintaining and caring for their environment.

D. Institutional development

Based on the research results, institutional strengthening is one of the main foundations of Kampung Jawi's success as a thematic village. The role of local leaders is very central in this regard, with the Pokdarwis chairperson previously serving as RT (*Rukun Tetangga*/Neighborhood Unit), RW (*Rukun Warga*/Community Unit), and LPMK (*Lembaga Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Kelurahan*/Village Community Empowerment Institution) chairperson. The process of forming the Kampung Jawi Pokdarwis did not happen instantly, but through the initiative of residents who actively wanted to promote culture as the strength of the village. After the village was initiated as a thematic village, Pokdarwis officially received a decree from the Tourism Office and joined the Semarang City Tourism Awareness Communication Forum (Forkom Pokdarwis).

This institution plays a key role in: 1) planning cultural and economic activities (Kampung Jawi, Pasar Jaten, and the Cultural Festival); 2) promoting the village as a thematic

tourist destination; 3) establishing partnerships with external parties such as universities, communities, and government agencies.

“After we were initiated as a thematic village, I knew that my responsibility was not only to the community but also to the Semarang City Government,” said Siswanto, Chairman of Pokdarwis.

In practice, the Kampung Jawi institution is collaborative and adaptive. Youth groups, community development boards, and community leaders are involved in various agendas. Each activity is designed collectively and implemented with clear role distribution, although not yet fully formalised. This model reflects the principle of co-production between residents and the government, where local institutional capacity serves as a bridging agent between residents’ needs and external resources (Sutomo, 2009).

However, there are challenges to the sustainability of these institutions, namely: 1) Regeneration of cadres: young people tend to be passive and not yet actively involved in institutional structures. 2) Dependence on central figures (personification of institutions), where most activities are still driven by one main figure.

Institutional development in Kampung Jawi is a key strength in driving community empowerment programmes. Local institutions such as Pokdarwis and LPMK play an important role in planning, implementation, and cross-sector partnerships. This situation highlights the importance of designing strategies for regeneration and cadre development within village institutions, so that the spirit of empowerment does not cease when the central figure is no longer in office. Institutional assistance from external parties, such as universities or NGOs, can be a solution to strengthen the cadre system and management structure of local organisations. Although it still faces challenges in terms of regeneration and personalisation of leadership, the existence of this structure has created a participatory and collaborative space that supports the institutional sustainability of thematic villages.

E. Legal Review and Analysis of the Thematic Village Programme in Semarang City

The Thematic Village Programme initiated by the Semarang City Government is not only a community-based social development policy, but also an important subject of study in the context of regional law and state administrative law. From a legal perspective, the primary legal basis for this programme can be found in Semarang City Regulation No. 12 of 2016 on Poverty Alleviation and Semarang Mayor Regulation No. 22 of 2018 on Guidelines for Implementing the Thematic Village Programme. Additionally, its regulations have constitutional legitimacy based on Article 18(5) of the 1945 Constitution, which grants local governments the authority to regulate and manage local community interests, and is further strengthened by Articles 22 and 23 of Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government. Thus, the thematic village policy has fulfilled the principle of legality in administrative law.

However, normatively, this policy does not yet fully reflect the principles of good administrative law (*algemene beginselen van behoorlijk bestuur/ABBB*), particularly the principles of transparency, accountability, and public participation. In many cases, the initiative to establish thematic villages is still top-down and highly dependent on local leaders, so that public participation, which should be the main principle of empowerment law, has not been optimised. In essence, this shows an imbalance between legal norms that emphasise participation (as reflected in Perwal 22/2018) and implementation in the field, which tends to be personalistic.

From the perspective of responsive law theory as developed by Nonet and Selznick (1978), the thematic village policy shows the potential to become a form of law that is adaptive to social needs. Responsive law is not only oriented towards certainty, but also justice and effectiveness. Thematic villages as local community-based policy instruments reflect the character of law oriented towards substantive justice, especially because they involve dimensions of local culture, creative economy, and environmental preservation (Feritrianti et al., 2022; Martuti et al., 2021). However, its implementation is often hampered by weak technical regulations, the absence of legal success indicators, and the lack of community oversight and grievance mechanisms, which should be part of the principle of due process of law in modern administrative law.

Furthermore, from an institutional legal perspective, the strengthening of community organisations such as the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) is a form of legal sub-system formation at the micro level. Pokdarwis de facto performs public service functions and manages the budget for thematic village activities. However, in practice, this institution often lacks formal legal standing within the local legal system, leading to potential conflicts of authority and difficulties in accounting for the use of public funds. This indicates the need for legal reform in the form of regional regulations or mayoral decisions that clearly regulate the institutional structure of thematic villages, including budget accountability, the appointment of administrators, terms of office, and performance evaluation mechanisms. In this context, the principle of good governance needs to be institutionalised through more detailed regional legal instruments.

When linked to the theory of development law proposed by Satjipto Rahardjo (2014), thematic villages are a form of law as a tool of social engineering. The development law approach encourages the law to not only be a guardian of the status quo, but also a facilitator of social and cultural transformation. As such, strengthening the law on thematic villages should cover the dimensions of substance (detailed regulations), structure (participatory institutions), and culture (public legal awareness). In this case, the existence of thematic villages needs to be positioned as part of a legal empowerment strategy for the poor, where law becomes an instrument of emancipation and empowerment for marginalised communities.

Based on this analysis, the legal recommendations that can be proposed include: (1) the establishment of a new local regulation or revision of the local regulation to regulate the institutions of thematic villages more comprehensively; (2) the formulation of legal indicators of the success of the empowerment programme; (3) the establishment of an independent civil society-based evaluation unit to assess policy implementation; and (4) the development of a legal grievance mechanism to guarantee the protection of citizens' rights. Thus, the thematic village programme can develop not only as a local-based development policy, but also as a local legal entity that is legitimate, fair, and structurally and normatively sustainable.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the community empowerment programme in Kampung Jawi demonstrates the integration of the four aspects of empowerment according to Mardikanto, namely human development, business development, environmental development, and institutional development. These four aspects run simultaneously and reinforce each other in shaping the independence of the local community. Human development is evident in the active involvement of residents, especially teenagers and housewives, in various educational activities and the preservation of local culture. Meanwhile,

business development is reflected in the initiation of Kampung Jawi and Pasar Jaten, which have successfully opened up new economic opportunities based on traditional cuisine and local products. These economic activities not only increase household income but also strengthen the role of women as economic actors in the community.

At the same time, environmental development is an important element in strengthening the image of the village through physical restructuring and strengthening the visual identity based on Javanese values. Community service activities, the construction of a cultural hall, and the creation of traditional public spaces have succeeded in forming an environment that supports sustainable community participation. In terms of institutional aspects, the existence of Pokdarwis, youth organisations, and coordination with LPMK demonstrates that local social structures play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of the programme. Despite challenges such as cadre regeneration and low management capacity, synergy between internal and external actors has proven to be the key to the success of empowerment in Kampung Jawi. Thus, this thematic village-based empowerment model has high potential for replication in other areas with similar social and cultural characteristics.

6. References

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