



Ecological Policy Implementation: Thematic Village Program to Address Slum Area Issues in Malang City

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INFO ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Population density in Malang City causes various problems, one of which is slum areas. To overcome these problems, the Malang City Government issued a Thematic Village Program policy. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Thematic Village Program through an ecological policy implementation model. The method used is qualitative through literature study. This study shows that ecological factors are indeed the main reason for the policy. The Thematic Village Program in Malang City is one of the programs that is in accordance with the concept of ecological policy, where the program aims to increase development, economy, and welfare, while still preserving the environment/overcoming environmental problems faced. In the context of implementation, the interaction of collaborating actors plays their respective roles in supporting the realization of policy objectives. The conclusion in this study is that although the formation of thematic villages has succeeded in reducing urban slum areas, other obstacles/challenges faced are related to the sustainability of the Thematic Village development. Therefore, the government and collaborating actors can initiate follow-up programs to maintain the sustainability of the Thematic Village Program.



INTRODUCTION

Malang City in East Java is one of the cities with a relatively high population density. In 2020, Malang had a population of 843,810, ranking just below Surabaya as the most densely populated city in East Java (Ryo, 2021). Although Malang is classified as a major city, its resident population remains below one million; however, during the daytime, the number of people active in the city can reach up to 1.2 million (Ratri & Helmy, 2018). This situation has led to the emergence of various urban challenges. Environmental issues, such as waste management, have become a serious concern, with daily waste accumulation reaching 659.88 tons. Moreover, sanitation services remain uneven, with 15.4% of residents lacking access to proper sanitation. Frequent flooding also occurs in various parts of the city.

In addition to environmental problems, Malang also faces other major issues, including unequal access to education, traffic congestion, natural disasters, poverty, unemployment, and social vulnerability (Barenlitbang Kota Malang, 2017). These problems have contributed to a more complex issue: the emergence of slum areas. According to Mayoral Decree No. 188.45/86/35.73.112/2015 issued in 2015, the total slum area in Malang City covers approximately 608.6 hectares. The existence of these slums further exacerbates challenges related to public health, the economy, and social welfare (Akbar & Alfian, 2018).

To address the issue of slum settlements, the Malang City Government introduced a policy known as the Thematic Village Program (Setyono, 2018). This program aims to improve the governance of urban residential areas through a design competition that encourages the development of villages based on their unique characteristics and potential. It is implemented using a collaborative approach that emphasizes community involvement and participation. The outcomes of the program are supported by sub-district, district, and city-level governments through funding mechanisms, which may include allocations from the regional government budget (APBD) as well as contributions from local businesses and companies operating in Malang (Setyono, 2018).

Numerous studies have examined the Thematic Village Program in Malang City. Widyarthara & Rizqi Afdholy (2022) analyzed the characteristics of settlements in thematic villages in Malang City. Using Doxiadis' theory as the analytical framework, their study found that thematic village settlements in Malang exhibit diverse conditions in terms of natural and protected aspects, while more uniform conditions are seen in social and network aspects. Next, Sukowati (2022) investigated the impact of the thematic village program on the transformation of urban village settlements into tourist destinations. Employing Henri Lefebvre's concepts of abstract space and social space, the study concluded that several thematic villages remain underdeveloped and are predicted to be unsustainable in the future.

Akbar & Alfian (2018) explored the impacts of thematic village development in Malang City and reported that the development of thematic villages has contributed positively to regional development in Malang. Furthermore, Pradana (2019) analyzed the factors influencing the existence and sustainability of the Kramat Thematic Village. The findings revealed that the village remains viable due to the application of a contextual-complex concept of space and life by its residents. Lastly, Hamka & Afdholy (2022) studied the settlement planning concepts along the riverbanks of thematic villages based on architectural principles. Their findings indicated a need to improve safety and security aspects for residents living near the river and called for stronger policy support from the government in terms of regulation and management.

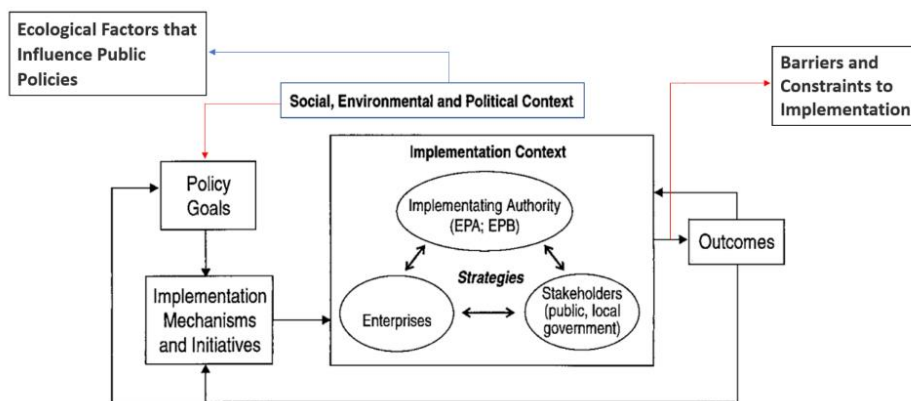
Despite these various studies, none have analyzed the Thematic Village Program from an ecological policy perspective. This perspective concerns how the government formulates a series of environmental regulations based on local conditions to develop environmental protection measures aligned with sustainable economic development goals. In this context, the environmental issue being addressed by the Malang City government is urban slums. This issue is being tackled through the Thematic Village Program, which is expected not only to resolve slum-related problems but also to attract tourists to these thematic villages.

Based on this, the present study aims to analyze the implementation of the Thematic Village Program from the perspective of ecological policy. Ecology is a branch of biology that studies living organisms and their interactions with the environment. It deals with levels of organization beyond individual organisms, namely



populations, communities, ecosystems, and the biosphere. Over time, the term "ecology" has evolved alongside the increasing complexity of environmental issues. This development has given rise to a broader understanding of ecology as the context in which public policies are formulated (Kolawole et al., 2018). In this sense, ecological factors can influence policymakers when making or selecting policy options to address identified problems. These factors serve both as guidelines and as strong evidence that the resulting policies can balance development, economic growth, and public welfare while also preserving the environment and addressing environmental challenges (Qin et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Environmental Policy Implementation Model. Adapted from Sinkule and Ortolano (1995)



The analytical model used in this study is based on Sinkule and Ortolano (1995). The model consists of four core components, which have been adapted to facilitate analysis in this research. The first component is the socioeconomic, political, and environmental context in which the process takes place, which in this study is generalized as ecological factors that influence policy. The second component is the implementation context, which includes the interactions among key actors involved in the process. The third component covers the policy objectives, as well as the mechanisms, implementation initiatives, and outcomes. Finally, the fourth component addresses the constraints or challenges encountered during policy implementation. This model illustrates how the results of policy implementation may significantly differ from the original policy objectives due to the interactions between key actors and the broader context in which the process occurs.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a literature review approach. A literature review was chosen because it allows the researcher to engage directly with data or texts without the need to conduct field interviews with eyewitnesses (Adlini et al., 2022). The data in this study are empirical and reliable as they are sourced from previous research journal articles, annual reports on the Thematic Village Program, and related news articles. The data are processed and analyzed descriptively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction serves to simplify, classify, and focus the collected data. Data presentation facilitates the explanation of the research as a whole or in parts. The data are conveyed through narrative or descriptive text. Meanwhile, drawing conclusions is a method to verify the data throughout the research process. Initial conclusions are provisional and may change as the research progresses (Sugiyono, 2015).



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ecological Issues That Influence Policy

The Thematic Village Development Policy in Malang City was initially launched in 2016. The Malang City Government, through the Regional Planning, Research, and Development Agency (Bappeda) of Malang City, organized the *Festival Rancang Malang* (FRM), also known as the Thematic Village Competition. As previously mentioned, this competition was a collaborative and participatory design effort—primarily involving local communities and university mentoring teams—to encourage the creation of distinctive thematic villages in Malang City. The competition was open to all 57 urban villages (*kelurahan*) in Malang, with each urban village required to propose one thematic village based on its local potential (Malangkota, 2016).

When tracing the reasons behind the development of the Thematic Village Program, several factors, particularly environmental ones, played a key role. Malang City has experienced a steady population increase each year, even before the program was introduced. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Malang City, the population was recorded at 840,973 in 2013, 844,973 in 2014, 851,298 in 2015, and 856,410 in 2017 (BPS, 2018). As a logical consequence, this population growth led to increased demand for infrastructure and facilities, such as housing. This, in turn, caused population density to rise, resulting in the reduction of green space and the emergence of urban slum areas (Assadiqie, 2019).

In general, slum areas in Malang City are characterized by conditions such as illegal housing, uninhabitable dwellings, disorganized buildings, and high population density. Other common issues include poor road access, inadequate rainwater drainage systems, weak disaster protection, insufficient public green open spaces (RTH), low educational attainment among residents, and a general lack of environmental awareness (Sakdiah & Rahmawati, 2021).

As outlined in the introduction of this study, slum areas in Malang City have become a priority issue that must be addressed by the government. In 2015, the total slum area was recorded at 608.6 hectares, based on Malang Mayor's Decree No. 188.45/86/35.73.112/2015. These slum areas gave rise to various follow-up problems, including health, economic, and social issues (Akbar & Alfian, 2018). In response to these challenges, the Thematic Village Program was ultimately developed not only to address the slum issue, but also to transform these areas into tourist destinations in Malang City (Assadiqie, 2019).

Policy Implementation and Results

The *Kampung Tematik* (Thematic Village) Program is an initiative focused on alleviating urban slum areas, promoting environmental sustainability, and creating new tourism destinations in Malang City. This program is not the result of a specific policy such as a Regional Regulation (*Perda*) or Mayor's Regulation (*Perwal*), but rather, it is incorporated into the Malang City Medium-Term Regional Development Plan (*RPJMD*) (Assadiqie, 2019). Therefore, the Malang City Government encouraged all urban villages (*kelurahan*) to implement the Thematic Village Program by organizing the *Festival Rancang Malang* (FRM) in 2016. FRM involved four main stakeholders: the Malang City Government, local media (Jawa Pos Radar Malang), community members, and higher education institutions or academic associations (Malangkota, 2016).

FRM was carried out through a series of structured stages. It began with outreach and publication, after which all 57 urban villages in Malang could propose a thematic village within their area. Based on these proposals, the Malang City Government submitted requests for community service support to universities or professional associations. If accepted, mentoring teams were assigned to the proposed villages. After a technical meeting, a collaborative design process took place between the local communities and the mentoring teams over a span of 50–60 days. The results were then evaluated by a panel of judges and submitted to the city's organizing committee. At the end of the assessment, the top five thematic villages were selected, with awards granted to the best ones based on their proposal, design renderings, and video presentation.

The evaluation also adhered to several guiding principles, including:

- a) Iconic thematic concept,
- b) Comprehensive approach, addressing not only physical but also non-physical aspects,



- c) Community involvement, emphasizing local participation in the design process,
- d) Effective and applicable solutions, focused on addressing priority issues with technology and cost appropriate to local capacities, and
- e) Sustainability, aiming for long-term ecological and social benefits beyond immediate impact (Malangkota, 2016).

As a result of the FRM initiative, 76 thematic village proposals were submitted from 57 urban villages—exceeding the initial target (though another study noted that 66 community groups actually participated) (Setyono, 2018). From this pool, five finalists were selected, and three were chosen as award winners:

- a) 1st place: Bamboo Mewek Village in Tunjungsekar,
- b) 2nd place: Petik Organik Village in Purwodadi,
- c) 3rd place: Keramat Village in Kasin (Syafi'i, 2016).

The emergence of these thematic villages has enhanced Malang's appeal as a tourism destination. Moreover, the slum issues in several urban areas have gradually been addressed through the development of these villages (Malangkota, 2022).

Policy implementation constraints/challenges

In terms of quantity, the number of ideas proposed for the development of *Kampung Tematik* (Thematic Villages) in Malang City exceeded the expectations of the organizing committee. However, the main challenge lies in transforming these ideas into reality rather than allowing them to remain mere competition entries. Of the 66 proposals submitted during the Festival Rancang Malang (FRM), only 45 villages actively pursued the realization of their thematic village concepts. Among these, several faced significant issues in the preparatory phase, including the lack of tourism appeal, inadequate infrastructure, weak internal and external institutional support, and unsupportive community conditions. Furthermore, Setyono's (2018) study indicated that 11 villages exhibited low levels of readiness for development. This was due to factors such as the absence of iconic buildings or visual identity, a lack of creative and tourism-oriented attractions, and insufficient road access. These deficiencies led to lower preparedness assessments for these 11 villages compared to others.

The challenges described above reflect a broader issue of sustainability. Of the initial 45 villages, recent media reports show that only 22 *Kampung Tematik* are still being promoted, some of which were already developed before the FRM initiative (Rahma, 2021; Sakti, 2022). The situation was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the closure of thematic villages across Malang. These closures posed a major challenge for post-pandemic revitalization efforts. The loss of income during the pandemic significantly hindered further development, including the organization of events aimed at attracting visitors (Sakti, 2022).

To address this, the Malang City Government provided financial assistance to 13 thematic villages, each receiving 50 million rupiah (Pratama, 2022). On one hand, this funding demonstrates the city government's commitment to supporting the development of *Kampung Tematik*. On the other hand, the limited number of villages receiving support highlights the significant sustainability challenge in maintaining and expanding the thematic village initiative.

CONCLUSION

The *Kampung Tematik* (Thematic Village) program in Malang City reflects the principles of ecological policy, as it aims to enhance development, economic growth, and community welfare while addressing environmental issues and promoting sustainability. The key ecological reason behind the establishment of the program was the increasing prevalence of urban slum areas, especially within the city's densely populated neighborhoods. To encourage villages across Malang City to develop thematic villages, the city government organized the Festival Rancang Malang (FRM).

In the context of implementation, which involves interaction among actors, the City Government through Bappeda (Regional Development Planning Agency), the local media outlet Jawa Pos Radar Malang, village communities, and higher education institutions or professional associations and academics, each had distinct



roles in carrying out the *Kampung Tematik* initiative. Although the program successfully generated numerous design ideas, a major challenge lies in turning those ideas into actual projects. Furthermore, while the creation of thematic villages has helped reduce slum areas, another pressing issue is ensuring the sustainability of the program, particularly in terms of maintaining and improving both the number and quality of thematic villages across Malang City.

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