

## Political Networks in the Production of Space: Negotiated Governance in the Dupak Magersari Railway-Edge Settlement, Surabaya

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### Abstract

Urban railway-side settlements are generally understood as a consequence of weak law enforcement or informal community practices. This perspective does not fully explain how space continues to be produced and maintained when various state institutions represent space under different authorities. This study explores how fragmented spatial representation shapes political networks and leads to negotiated governance in the production of space within the Dupak Magersari railway-side settlement in Surabaya. The research employs a qualitative approach and uses a case study design, involving field observations, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and document analysis. The analysis is conducted thematically by integrating Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and Partha Chatterjee's concept of political society. The findings reveal that representations of space by PT Kereta Api Indonesia, the Surabaya City Government, the National Land Agency, and other state actors fragment authority without creating a governance vacuum. Instead, this situation gives rise to political networks linking communities, the government, political actors, civil society organisations, and academics to mediate various interests through negotiation processes. These networks give rise to various forms of negotiated governance, such as the provision of public services, infrastructure development, the utilisation of economic space, and administrative recognition of residents, even though the legal status of land tenure remains ambiguous. This article argues that fragmented state authority is a structural condition; political networks are a mechanism of mediation; and negotiated governance is a form of governance that enables the production of space to take place within a context of ambiguous legality. These findings expand the interpretation of the theory of spatial production by positioning political networks as mechanisms that bridge the relationship between the state and society in the production of urban space.

**Keywords:** Spatial Production; Fragmentation of Spatial Representation;  
Political Networks; Negotiated Governance; Settlements along  
Railway Lines

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## Introduction

In various cities across the Global South, informal settlements persist even in areas legally designated as infrastructure corridors, buffer zones, protected areas, or public assets that should be free from settlement activity. These spaces present a paradox in urban governance, as the state simultaneously enforces regulations restricting land use while also providing administrative recognition, public services, and development interventions for the communities living there. Consequently, the persistence of informal settlements can no longer be explained solely as a consequence of weak law enforcement or the state's inability to control urbanisation, but rather as the result of a more complex interplay between regulations, bureaucratic practices, political dynamics, and community adaptation strategies (Chaskin, et al 2024; Ewnetu & Seo, 2025; Urwasi, 2026).

Contemporary literature indicates a fundamental shift in understanding this phenomenon. Whilst previous approaches tended to view informality as a form of illegality arising from planning failures or weak state capacity, recent studies demonstrate that informal settlements are part of the urban governance process itself (informality as governance). From this perspective, informal spaces are produced through ongoing interactions among formal policies, bureaucratic discretion, political interests, community organisations, and the collective actions of residents. Consequently, academic attention has shifted from merely questioning why informal settlements persist to understanding how governance practices, state-society relations, and institutional configurations shape the patterns of persistence of informal spaces,

which vary across urban contexts (Olaniran, T. O., & Aule, T. T., 2025).

Developments in the study of urban informality over the past decade have revealed a significant shift from approaches that view informality as a deviation from formal spatial planning to perspectives that regard it as an inherent part of urban governance. Recent research indicates that the existence of informal settlements is not solely determined by the state's weak capacity or policy implementation failures, but is shaped by a dynamic interplay among formal regulations, bureaucratic discretion, political interests, community organisations, and the negotiation practices that emerge in everyday life (Tonucci, 2024; Utomo & Mateo-Babiano, 2024; Urwasi, 2026). Within this perspective, the state is no longer understood as an actor that consistently enforces regulations through coercive mechanisms, but rather as an institutional configuration that generates diverse responses to informal spaces, ranging from eviction and neglect to investment and administrative recognition. This variation in responses demonstrates that the governance of informal settlements results from an interplay among institutional rationality, political interests, and the capacity of communities to build relationships with state actors (Urwasi, 2026; Tonucci, 2024).

This shift in perspective is also emerging in various studies of informal settlements in Indonesia. A number of studies show that urban villages and settlements developing along infrastructure corridors can no longer be understood solely as manifestations of urban poverty or violations of spatial planning, but rather as spaces continually produced through

community adaptation, organisation, and interaction with formal institutions. Research on railway-adjacent settlements in the city of Cimahi, for example, shows that communities not only adapt to spatial constraints and safety risks but also develop co-production practices to collectively provide protection mechanisms and services (Adharina et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, research on railway-adjacent settlements in Surabaya shows that the sustainability of these areas is sustained through a dialectic among spatial planning policies, urban development interests, and the community's evolving socio-spatial practices (Gerald, 2024; Handayani et al., 2026). Nevertheless, research trends in Indonesia remain dominated by discussions of community adaptation, settlement morphology, social resilience, or the implications of spatial planning policies; consequently, the political dimension—which explains how relationships among residents, state institutions, and intermediary actors shape the mechanisms underpinning the sustainability of informal spaces—remains relatively limited.

Developments in the study of urban informality indicate that academic debate no longer centres on attempts to distinguish between formal and informal spaces as opposing categories. Instead, recent studies show that informality is integral to the production and governance of urban space, unfolding through the interaction of formal regulations, administrative discretion, political interests and the everyday practices of communities. A systematic review of policies governing informal spaces reveals that the state

acts not only as a regulator seeking to control or eliminate informality, but also as an actor that selectively moderates, protects, restricts, or even facilitates its persistence through various policy instruments (Rafieian & Kianfar, 2023; Ewnetu & Seo, 2025). Consequently, the focus of the literature has shifted from questions about the legality of space to how institutions manage informality as part of urban governance practices, so that the relationship between the state and informal spaces is understood as dynamic, adaptive and contextual, rather than merely a relationship between authority and transgression.

This shift has subsequently spurred research into state–society relations in informal settlements. Various studies indicate that the sustainability of informal spaces depends not only on communities' ability to adapt to development pressures but also on the forms of day-to-day interaction among residents, local bureaucracies, city governments, and civil society organisations. In many cases, recognition of informal communities occurs through administrative mechanisms, public services, or local regulations, which are not always accompanied by recognition of land rights. Therefore, the state–society relationship within informal spaces is better understood as an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a purely coercive or legalistic relationship (Bhattacharjee, 2023; Chaskin et al., 2024). This perspective shows that citizenship practices in informal settlements develop through various forms of partial recognition, enabling communities to access public services and administrative protection without altering the legal status of the spaces they occupy.

Attention to the political mechanisms linking actors in this process remains limited. Some research on urban governance emphasises the importance of collaborative networks between the government and non-state actors, whilst other studies suggest that these relationships are often mediated by intermediaries (brokers) who connect residents' interests with state institutions. In practice, political brokerage not only facilitates the exchange of information and resources but also shapes power configurations that can either strengthen or limit marginalised groups' access to decision-making processes (Schiller et al., 2023; Koster, 2025). Recent studies on urban politics and governance also indicate that urban governance increasingly depends on cross-institutional network configurations, making the analysis of inter-actor relations increasingly important for understanding how public decisions are produced, negotiated, and implemented (Marques, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

Although this literature has deepened understanding of governance networks, it still largely treats inter-actor relationships as matters of institutional coordination or policy collaboration. Attention to how political networks mediate the production and sustainability of informal spaces—particularly in settlements along railway lines in urban areas of Indonesia—remains relatively limited. This gap serves as the starting point for this study, which then delves more specifically into the context of Dupak Magersari as a critical case.

Based on the above discussion, this article poses the research question of how the process of spatial production in the Dupak Magersari railway-side settlement is mediated by political networks that influence negotiated governance

in maintaining the settlement's sustainability. To this end, the perspective of spatial production is not only expressed through representations constructed by state institutions, but also through political relations that bring together state and civil society actors within a context of legal ambiguity. Drawing on Chatterjee (2004), these relationships are understood as practices of political society—an arena in which groups operating outside legal certainty establish access to the state through political negotiation and mediation. Within this arena, political networks are positioned as an analytical mechanism to explain how inter-group relationships, resource exchanges, and mediation processes shape the production of space in the context of settlements along railway lines.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using an intrinsic case study design (Stake, 1995) to understand how political networks mediate the production of space and shape negotiated governance in the Dupak Magersari railway-side settlement. This settlement is chosen as the case study because it is one of the oldest railway-side settlements in Surabaya, having developed since the 1950s, and it demonstrates complex interactions among PT Kereta Api Indonesia, the Surabaya City Government, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), civil society organisations, and the community in the management of space with ambiguous legal status. These characteristics make Dupak Magersari a relevant case for explaining how the production of space unfolds through political

relations within the context of informal settlement.

The research was conducted in stages from January 2023 to January 2026. Primary data collection was carried out in 2023 through field observations and in-depth interviews, whilst the period 2024–2026 was utilised to conduct follow-up interviews with several key informants, verify field findings, collect policy documents, and triangulate ongoing policy developments with the dynamics of area planning.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their level of knowledge, authority and involvement in the spatial production process in Dupak Magersari. Furthermore, snowball sampling was used to identify actors comprising officials from the Surabaya City Government, PT Kereta Api Indonesia Operational Region 8 Surabaya, members of the Surabaya City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), RT/RW officials, community leaders, civil society organisations (East Java Community Architects), academics, and residents living in the area adjacent to the railway tracks.

### **Fragmented State Authority as the Structural Condition of Political Networks**

The pressures of urbanisation, ongoing since the late 1960s, have shaped areas along the railway tracks into residential spaces for communities with limited access to urban areas, and this situation persists to this day (Basundoro, 2012; Gerald, 2024). The development of railway infrastructure,

including the construction of double-track lines, together with various urban modernisation programmes, subsequently brought these areas into the flow of an increasingly technocratic spatial planning process. However, these physical and policy changes did not immediately eliminate the settlements that had already formed. Their persistence is linked to the fact that railway corridors do not fall within a single, entirely uniform regulatory framework. Within the same space, various representations of the state coexist; these sometimes complement one another, but under certain conditions also create differing boundaries of authority and interpretations of the space's function, status, and legitimacy (Lefebvre, 1991; Jessop, 2007; Brenner, 2004).

These conditions have led to the development of the railway right-of-way as a space situated at the intersection of various institutional rationalities. For PT Kereta Api Indonesia, for example, this space relates to operational safety and asset management; for the land administration, it falls within the framework of land registration and land rights; whilst for the city government, the same area forms part of the urban spatial planning and environmental system that is already inhabited and functions socially. At the same time, for the community of Dupak Magersari, this space constitutes the environment in which daily life, social reproduction and economic activities take place.

Consequently, the political issue at stake goes beyond whether the settlement is legal or illegal. The crux of the matter lies in how various institutions and social groups ascribe different

meanings to the same space and then use those meanings to shape their actions and the limits of their authority. Within Lefebvre's framework (1991), these differences show that representations of space do not derive from a single source of power. They are produced through various institutions, each bringing its own set of knowledge, rules and institutional interests. Consequently, the fragmentation of authority in the case of Dupak Magersari is better understood as the coexistence of multiple representations of space operating simultaneously, rather than merely an overlap of administrative authority (Lefebvre, 1991; Jessop, 2007; Brenner, 2004).

This statement shows that PT KAI does not primarily view the railway corridor as an urban residential space, but as infrastructure whose legitimacy derives from railway law and state asset management. Consequently, the presence of long-established settlements does not alter PT KAI's institutional representation of space. Rather, the settlement is interpreted as an occupation within a space whose original function has already been determined by the railway regulatory framework. In Lefebvre's terms, this illustrates how representations of space are produced through legal, technical, and bureaucratic knowledge that seeks to stabilise a particular spatial order independently of the social practices developing within it (Lefebvre, 1991).

PT KAI consistently regards the railway right-of-way as part of the state's assets and as a safety corridor for railway operations that must be protected from activities that could disrupt the safety of train journeys. "Well, that's part of KAI's assets; although in reality it is occupied by settlements, administratively speaking it is state

land. "You can see for yourself how many metres the houses are from the tracks; the rules clearly state that it's not permitted." (Interview with the Public Relations Manager of PT KAI Daop 8 Surabaya, 23/06/2025).

This perspective is rooted in the railway regulatory regime, which, since the reform era, has increasingly reinforced a technocratic rationale for spatial management. Law No. 23 of 2007 on Railways, Minister of Transport Regulation No. 28 of 2011 on Technical Requirements for Railway Lines, and Minister of Transport Regulation No. 60 of 2012 on Technical Requirements for Railway Lines define the track right-of-way as railway line utility space (Rumaja), railway-owned space (Rumija), and railway supervision space (Ruwasja), all of which must be maintained to ensure operational safety.

From PT KAI's institutional perspective, the railway corridor is therefore understood not primarily as an urban neighbourhood but as a strategic infrastructure system, with its spatial function predetermined by legal and technical standards. Within this regulatory framework, settlements are treated as activities occupying space whose principal function is to support railway operations rather than residential use. Consequently, the presence of long-established communities does not fundamentally alter PT KAI's institutional representation of the corridor, because the legitimacy of space derives from statutory regulations governing railway infrastructure rather than from patterns of occupation that have evolved over time.

This institutional position illustrates how representations of space are produced through legal instruments, engineering standards, cadastral documentation, and bureaucratic

procedures that seek to stabilise a particular spatial order. In Lefebvre's (1991) formulation, conceived space is constructed through abstract knowledge that classifies, measures, and regulates space according to technical rationality. The railway corridor is therefore represented as an object of regulation, with primary value in operational safety and infrastructure protection, rather than as a social space produced through everyday life. This finding demonstrates that PT KAI's representation of space is inseparable from its institutional mandate to safeguard railway assets and operational reliability.

These institutional arrangements indicate that representations of space are shaped by legal frameworks, technical railway standards, asset management documents, and bureaucratic procedures that aim to provide certainty about the function and boundaries of space. In Lefebvre's (1991) account, this process is characteristic of 'conceived space'—that is, space constructed through abstract knowledge and classified, measured, and regulated according to a specific rationality. Within this framework, the railway right-of-way primarily functions as an object of regulation, with its primary value determined by operational safety and the protection of infrastructure, rather than by the social practices taking place within it.

This perspective also shows that PT KAI's representation of space cannot be separated from its institutional mandate. When space is treated as part of the railway's assets and safety systems, settlements are interpreted primarily in terms of their implications for these functions. Consequently, the social life that has

developed around the railway tracks does not automatically alter the institutional construction of space; rather, both reveal a distinction between space as designed and regulated through institutional mechanisms and space as lived and reproduced by communities in their daily lives (Lefebvre, 1991).

This representation is further reinforced by PT KAI's approach to historical land claims. Although the institution recognises that many sections of the railway corridor remain occupied by settlements that have existed for decades, its asset management continues to rely on the historical status of the *grondkaart* as the primary basis for identifying railway property. As explained by the Assistant Manager for Asset Programme and Evaluation at PT KAI Operational Region 8 Surabaya:

For us, the *grondkaart* serves as the initial technical evidence of ownership, although it still needs to be converted by the National Land Agency. We are currently inventorying and legalising these assets in a gradual, carefully planned manner. The difficulty is that many of these areas have long been occupied by residential communities, and the conversion process also requires coordination with the National Land Agency and, in practice, agreement from local residents. (Interview, 13 December 2025).

Rather than indicating a fully consolidated territorial authority, this statement reveals that PT KAI's institutional claim remains embedded in an ongoing process of legal and administrative consolidation. The persistence of *grondkaart* as the principal reference for asset identification shows that the state's

representation of railway space is mediated by multiple legal regimes, spanning the colonial period to contemporary land administration. Consequently, the issue is not simply whether PT KAI possesses authority over the corridor, but how that authority continues to be negotiated across institutional systems governing railway infrastructure, land administration, and urban development.

Unlike PT KAI, which views railway corridors primarily in terms of state assets and operational safety, the BPN views the same area from a land administration perspective. The BPN's focus is not primarily on the function of the railway line, but on how plots of land are recorded, identified and situated within the applicable land administration system. Consequently, historical claims to a plot of land do not, in themselves, indicate that the plot has consolidated title status within the contemporary land administration system. The status of a plot also depends on the process of registering and recording title rights within the national land system. This distinction became evident during interviews with officials from the National Land Agency. According to one informant:

Indeed, land based on the *grondkaart* must be re-registered with BPN. If a parcel appears in the BHUMI system with the status 'Tipe Hak: Kosong', it means that, administratively, the parcel has not yet been formally registered or assigned a legally recognised land title. However, this does not necessarily mean that the land has no owner or that it is not being occupied in practice. (Interview with BPN Official, 6/10 2025).

This statement highlights a discrepancy between claims of ownership rooted in the

railway system's institutional history and the land administration mechanisms currently in force. PT KAI continues to regard the *grondkaart* as a key basis for identifying and managing railway assets, whilst the BPN assesses the status of a plot of land based on its registration within the land administration system. Consequently, plots historically associated with railway assets may not yet appear as plots with registered rights in the contemporary land administration system. The issue, therefore, extends beyond who controls the land; it concerns the intersection of several administrative regimes that use different bases and procedures to determine the status of the same space.

This situation is evident on the BHUMI ATR/BPN digital platform, where a number of plots in the Dupak Magersari railway right-of-way area are recorded with the notation 'Type of Right: Blank'. This notation should be interpreted administratively to indicate that no land rights are recorded in the land database, rather than as evidence that the plots have no history of occupation or are not used by the community. Consequently, the BHUMI data reveals a discrepancy between the status recorded in the land administration system, the history of railway asset control, and the reality of occupation on the ground (ATR/BPN, n.d.).

This discrepancy demonstrates that PT KAI and the BPN do not provide identical answers about the same space. PT KAI frames the issue in terms of asset protection and the continuity of railway operations, whilst the BPN operates through the logic of registration and administrative certainty regarding land rights. These two perspectives can coexist without producing a fully consolidated spatial status.

From the perspective of Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the production of space, this situation shows that 'conceived space' is shaped by a number of institutional mechanisms that do not always produce a uniform representation. Here, the fragmentation of authority becomes politically significant: not merely because there are many institutions, but because each institution can define specific aspects of that space based on its own regime of knowledge and authority (Jessop, 2007; Brenner, 2004).

These differing constructions become increasingly apparent when attention turns to the Surabaya City Government. The city government acknowledges that, normatively speaking, the Dupak Magersari settlement does not fully comply with spatial planning regulations. However, interviews with Bappeko indicate that this issue is not viewed solely as a matter of spatial utilisation violations. The City Government's limited authority over land under PT KAI's control means that any intervention must take into account the boundaries of inter-institutional authority. At the same time, the area has become an integral part of the urban fabric, demanding public services, environmental management and attention to the livelihoods of its residents. Consequently, the city government's spatial planning approach operates at the intersection of compliance with spatial planning regulations and responsibility for the social fabric that has developed within the area.

We generally classify this type of settlement as a squatter settlement, and in principle it does not conform to the spatial plan. However, the land belongs to PT KAI, so the municipal

government cannot simply intervene because it is not our property. Spatial planning is not merely about drawing plans on paper; every area has been identified in the RDTR, but any intervention still requires coordination with the relevant land-owning institutions. (Interview with Bappeko Official, 16 November 2025).

Although, in theory, the areas surrounding railway lines are designated as non-residential zones, the Surabaya City Government's approach to long-established settlements is not entirely focused on clearing the area. Interviews with the DPRKPP indicate that densely populated settlements along the railway right-of-way mean direct enforcement is not the only policy option. A phased approach to urban planning and realistic relocation options are considered more feasible, given the livelihoods of residents who have long been settled in the area. The RDTR and the city's land-use plan provide a clearer spatial context, and in certain sections they still preserve existing conditions, provided they do not interfere with railway operations. Thus, the regulations do not entirely eliminate the existence of settlements; rather, under certain conditions, they provide scope for existing settlements to continue within the limits determined by the area's primary function.

At this juncture, the railway buffer zone reveals a contradiction that cannot be explained solely by the opposition between the legal and the illegal. On the one hand, the state upholds norms governing the buffer zone's function, railway safety, and land use control. On the other hand, municipal authorities continue to grapple with a residential environment that,

socially speaking, has become an integral part of urban life. This contradiction is evident in the daily lives of the Dupak Magersari community: religious activities take place regularly, children attend school, residents work as labourers or traders around Turi Market, whilst some women run small businesses and engage in economic activities within their neighbourhood. Village life is also underpinned by social structures such as the RT, RW, PKK and Posyandu, as well as various collective community activities. The space, defined in planning documents by specific boundaries and functions, has thus undergone social reproduction as a relatively stable living environment.

This distinction shows that the fragmentation of spatial representation is not synonymous with the absence of governance. The state remains present, but its presence is dispersed across institutions with different functions and spheres of authority. PT KAI maintains control over railway assets and safety; the National Land Agency (BPN) operates through land administration; the Surabaya City Government manages spatial planning, public services and urban life; whilst the community reproduces space through everyday social practices. None of these roles can, on its own, resolve the entire issue. Consequently, the continuity of the Dupak Magersari area is shaped by these various authorities, which are not fully integrated (Lefebvre, 1991; Jessop, 2007; Brenner, 2004).

The continuity of this way of life does not mean that the community is entirely beyond the reach of the state. On the contrary, the residents of Dupak Magersari have been integrated into various administrative mechanisms and urban

services. The existence of RTs and RWs, possession of identity cards (KTP), payment of property tax (PBB) in certain areas, and access to electricity, clean water, education, and social services indicate that, in practical terms, the community is recognised as part of the population of the City of Surabaya, even though their land tenure status is not on a par with that of residential areas with secure land rights. This gives rise to a condition of analytical significance: recognition of residents' existence as part of the city does not automatically result in recognition of their land tenure rights. The two coexist within distinct administrative regimes (Guston, D. H., 2001; Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2007). These mechanisms do not operate solely through formal bureaucratic procedures but develop through various practices of negotiation that characterise the relationship between the state and society, as described in the concept of 'political society', and through networks linking citizens, municipal government actors, civil society organisations, and various other institutions in the process of the reproduction of space (Lefebvre, 1991; Chattarjee, 2004).

### **Political Networks and Negotiated Governance**

The issue that subsequently arises is no longer which institution has authority over the railway right-of-way, but how these authorities can coordinate with one another when the community faces concrete problems. In Dupak Magersari, a single institution cannot address the need for clean water, infrastructure improvements, sustainable economic activities, and improved environmental quality. Each of these issues cuts across the jurisdictional

boundaries outlined in the previous discussion. Consequently, the sustainability of settlements depends not only on the existence of institutions with differing roles, but also on the relationships that enable residents to articulate their needs and link them to the resources and powers distributed among these institutions.

From Lefebvre's (1991) perspective, these relationships can be understood as part of the dialectic of space production. Representations of space, shaped through legal and institutional frameworks, are confronted by the spatial practices of society that continue to unfold in everyday life. However, this encounter does not take place in a political vacuum. It occurs through inter-correlative relations involving actors with differing capacities, resources and institutional positions. The production of space is therefore also a political process: a need gains attention, a demand finds a channel for representation, and a decision can be realised when relationships bring together these dispersed interests and capacities.

This understanding aligns with Brenner (2004) and Jessop (2007), who view the state not as a single actor with a fully integrated centre of control, but as an institutional configuration that is constantly undergoing differentiation, reorganisation, and inter-institutional relations. Within such a configuration, access to the state does not always occur through a single bureaucratic channel. Actors seeking services or the resolution of specific issues may find themselves dealing with several institutions simultaneously, each with different powers and resources. Political networks in this context are

understood not merely as a collection of actors, but as relationships that enable resources, information, interests, and institutional access to flow between different positions within the state-society configuration.

Political networks serve as a mediating mechanism between the fragmentation of authority and the practice of spatial governance. These networks connect actors with different types of resources: the community brings knowledge and experience of everyday issues; RT/RW units possess social proximity and the capacity to articulate community concerns; the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) and political actors have access to representation and decision-making channels; the city government possesses the administrative apparatus and service provision; PT KAI holds authority over railway assets and operations; whilst civil society organisations and academics provide knowledge and facilitation. Relationships between these parties are not always formal or equal; indeed, it is precisely through these differences in position that the mediation process becomes crucial.

The case of access to clean water illustrates this mechanism in concrete terms. Residents' needs cannot be met solely through citizenship status or routine service mechanisms, as the installation of water networks is hampered by land-use issues concerning land under the control of PT KAI. This issue was subsequently addressed through interactions among residents, neighbourhood representatives, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), the Surabaya City Government, PT Surya Sembada, and PT KAI. Consequently, the

solution that ultimately emerged did not resolve the issue of land tenure, but enabled public service needs to be met through arrangements acceptable to the actors involved.

This framework can be linked to Chatterjee's (2004) concept of political society. For community groups living under conditions of legal uncertainty, relations with the state are not always built solely through formal claims to rights. Access to the state can be established through negotiation, mediation and practical recognition that emerge from the concrete issues of everyday life. In the case of Dupak Magersari, this relationship is evident when residents' needs do not remain merely community demands, but are channelled through RT/RW officials, political actors, the city council, and supporting organisations until they reach institutions with the capacity to respond.

One of the clearest manifestations of political networks in Dupak Magersari is the long-standing struggle to secure access to clean water. Although the settlement had developed into a densely populated urban neighbourhood, the extension of the municipal water supply network was constrained by the land's legal status, which remained under the control of PT Kereta Api Indonesia. Consequently, the issue could not be resolved solely through routine administrative procedures or the formal urban planning process. Instead, it evolved into a political issue requiring coordination among institutions with different authorities and interests.

As a member of the Surabaya City Council (DPRD) explained:

Regardless of land status, these people have lived there for decades. They work, raise families, and are part of Surabaya's citizenry.

Their basic needs cannot be ignored because of administrative issues. (Interview with Budi Leksono, DPRD Surabaya, 15/10/2025).

This statement shows that the debate over clean water was no longer centred exclusively on land ownership. Instead, political representation shifted the focus to residents' status as urban citizens entitled to basic public services. In this case, the DPRD acted as a political broker, translating community demands into governmental priorities and facilitating negotiations among PT Kereta Api Indonesia, the Surabaya City Government, and PT Surya Sembada, the municipally owned water utility. Through this mediation, access to clean water was eventually secured by installing a master meter rather than through conventional land regularisation procedures (Tribunnews.com, 1/10/2015; Suara Surabaya, 5/05/2015).

A similar configuration emerged after the collapse of the only bridge connecting RW 09 in early 2025. Although the damaged bridge was essential public infrastructure, administrative responses initially stalled due to overlapping institutional responsibilities and the land's legal status. Progress occurred only after local community leaders mobilised their political networks, engaging Deputy Mayor Armuji and DPRD member Budi Leksono, both of whom directly advocated for immediate government intervention (Jawa Pos, 14/02/2025).

The bridge-repair case shows that infrastructure issues in Dupak Magersari are resolved not through linear bureaucratic channels, but through a political network that brings together actors with different authorities, resources, and positions. Within this network, the Head of the Neighbourhood Unit (RW) acts

as a community intermediary, articulating the community's day-to-day needs in administrative and political language that state institutions can understand. This role involves not merely conveying aspirations, but also translating local issues into an agenda that garners the attention of government actors.

Meanwhile, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) performs a political brokerage function by bringing the community's demands into the formal political arena. As a representative body, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) lacks the technical authority to build infrastructure, but it has access to the budgeting process, coordination across local government departments, and the ability to forge political commitments with the city government. The brokerage function is not understood as a clientelistic practice, but rather as a mechanism of representation that links community needs with the institutional capacity of the state (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

On the other hand, the Surabaya City Government serves as an administrative enabler—an actor with administrative authority, fiscal resources and bureaucratic capacity to translate the outcomes of political negotiations into concrete action. The repair of the new bridge could be realised once this political network secured administrative support through coordination among local government agencies and the allocation of public resources. Political decisions take on a material form through the city government's institutional capacity.

This network extends beyond state actors. Civil society organisations, particularly the East Java Community Architects (Arkompf), together with academics and students from various universities, have expanded the network by providing knowledge resources, supporting the community, facilitating dialogue, and drafting various proposals for area planning. (Unair.ac.id, 27 July 2024; Uinsa.ac.id, 5 June 2024; Riskyawan & Shinta, 2025). Unlike the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), which connects the community with the formal political arena, civil society organisations and academics act as knowledge brokers, bridging the community's lived experiences with technical knowledge, participatory planning, and policy advocacy. This role strengthens the community's capacity to negotiate with state institutions without supplanting the community's position as the primary actor.

Mosse (2005) explains that supporting actors play a vital role in linking local experiences to development processes, whilst Guston (2001) describes this role as that of 'boundary organisations'—actors who bridge the worlds of knowledge and policy-making. In this study, this function is reflected in the involvement of the East Java Community Architects, academics, and students in supporting the community and facilitating various dialogue processes with the city government.

Table 1. Dimensions of Negotiated Governance in Dupak Magersari Settlement

| Dimension of | Empirical | Main Actors |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
|--------------|-----------|-------------|

| Negotiated Governance         | Evidence                                                                |                                         |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Administration Recognition    | RT/RW Administratin ID Cards (KTP), Property Tax (PBB). Public Services | Surabaya City Government, RT/RW         |
| Infrasctructural Negotiations | Clean Water Access, Bridge Rehabilitation, Public Lighting              | DPRD, City Government, PT Surya Sembada |
| Political Brokerage           | Medation of Resident Demands, through DPRD and Deputy Major             | DPRD, Deputy Major, RW                  |
| Knowledge Mediation           | Particapotory planning, community empowerment, climate adaption         | CSO Arkom Jatim, Academics University   |
| Selective Tolerance           | Morning Market activities along the railway                             | PT KAI, citizen, RW                     |
| Legal Ambiguity               | Grondkaart, BHUMI ATR BPN                                               | PT KAI, BPN                             |

The preceding analysis demonstrates that negotiated governance in Dupak Magersari is not expressed through a single institutional arrangement, but through a series of negotiated practices involving different actors, resources, and governance mechanisms. Rather than representing separate processes, these dimensions are interconnected and collectively explain how the settlement continues to be reproduced despite persistent legal ambiguity. Table 1 summarises the principal dimensions of negotiated governance identified in this study and the corresponding empirical evidence.

Political networks enable diverse representations of space—state assets according to PT KAI, land administration according to the National Land Agency (BPN),

public services according to the Surabaya City Government, and living space according to the community—to converge in an ongoing process of negotiation. Space in Dupak Magersari is not produced unilaterally by either the state or the community, but rather through a dialectical relationship linking institutional authority, political representations, knowledge and the practices of everyday life.

This configuration shows that centrality within political networks is relational rather than hierarchical. No single actor holds a permanent position of authority across all governance processes. Instead, centrality shifts with the issue under negotiation, the institutional resources required, and the actors able to bridge fragmented state authority. Consequently, political influence depends less on formal organisational rank than on the capacity to connect institutions with different mandates, resources, and decision-making authority.

At the community level, neighbourhood leaders (RT and RW) act as intermediaries, articulating residents' needs and translating everyday problems into collective claims that can be communicated to government institutions. When these claims require formal political representation, members of the Surabaya City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) serve as political brokers, facilitating negotiations among local communities, municipal agencies, PT Kereta Api Indonesia, and other state institutions. Their role is not primarily to exchange electoral support for material benefits, but to bridge competing institutional rationalities so that residents' demands can be accommodated within existing

governance arrangements (Chatterjee, 2004; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

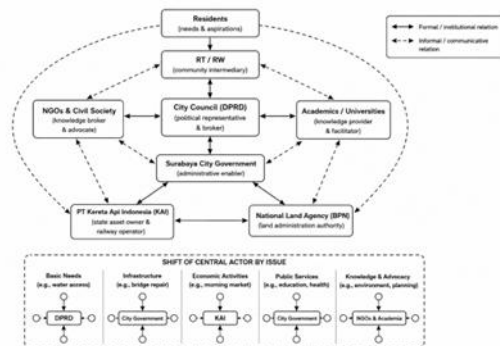


Figure 1. Political Network in Dupak Magersari

These findings suggest that political networks in Dupak Magersari operate through complementary forms of mediation rather than a fixed chain of command. Community leaders mobilise local knowledge and social trust; political representatives activate institutional access and governmental authority; and civil society organisations and academics provide technical expertise and policy translation. Each actor becomes strategically important only in relation to specific governance problems. Accordingly, the network functions as a polycentric configuration in which multiple centres of coordination emerge according to the character of the issue being negotiated, without any single actor exercising comprehensive control over the production of space. Through this relational configuration, fragmented institutional authority is transformed into negotiated forms of governance that enable the continued reproduction of everyday urban life despite the persistence of legal ambiguity.

## Conclusion

This article demonstrates that the production of space in the Dupak Magersari railway-side settlement cannot be understood solely in terms of land-tenure legality or state dominance over space. The research findings show that various state institutions represent space according to their distinct mandates, resulting in a fragmentation of spatial representation. Amidst these conditions, the community continues to reproduce its daily life through various social practices and secures administrative recognition through public services, even though the legal status of land tenure remains ambiguous.

This fragmentation does not create a governance vacuum but rather creates a space for interaction mediated by political networks. Political networks involving the community, RT/RW (neighbourhood units), the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), the Surabaya City Government, PT Kereta Api Indonesia, civil society organisations, and academics serve as a mediation mechanism that connects various interests, authorities, and resources to resolve spatial issues. Through this mechanism, various forms of negotiated governance have developed in the provision of public services, infrastructure development, the utilisation of economic space, and the management of the daily lives of communities in areas adjacent to the railway tracks.

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