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Hybrid Deliberation in the Dago Elos Urban Land Conflict: Counter-Publics and Communication Strategies

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Muklis Efendi[1*], Radita Gora Tayibnafis[1], Ana Kuswanti[1]
[1]Master in Communications Studies, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jakarta, Jln RS. Fatmawati Raya, Pondok Labu, Cilandak, Jakarta 12450 - Indonesia
[*]Corresponding author: 2410421028@mahasiswa.upnvj.ac.id

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Abstract - This study analyzes deliberative communication practices in urban land conflict, focusing on how communities build and maintain deliberative spaces under structural constraints. A qualitative case study was conducted on the Dago Elos land conflict in Bandung City, involving 331 families facing eviction claims. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with four stakeholder representatives: community leaders, legal aid organizations, local government officials, and land administration agencies. The study reveals three key findings: (1) Institutional fragmentation creates a complete absence of formal dialogue forums between communities and government, forcing communities to develop alternative communication strategies; (2) Counter-public sphere innovation through the Forum Dago Melawan demonstrates successful implementation of deliberative principles (equal participation, consensus-building, reason-giving) at the grassroots level, functioning as a genuine democratic laboratory; (3) Hybrid communication strategies emerge as communities combine rational argumentation with mass mobilization, challenging the traditional dichotomy between reasoned deliberation and political action. Mass actions prove effective in forcing institutional responses when formal channels remain closed, demonstrating that collective mobilization can function as deliberative communication under non-ideal conditions. The research expands deliberative communication theory by showing that deliberative principles can function in non-ideal conditions through creative adaptation and grassroots institutional innovation. Counter-public spheres like Forum Dago Melawan can successfully implement Habermas's ideal speech situation in local settings, while hybrid strategies combining reason-giving with collective action create communicative power capable of influencing administrative responses despite structural power asymmetries. These findings suggest that genuine deliberative communication requires acknowledging and addressing power inequalities rather than hiding them behind claims of procedural neutrality.

Keywords: counter-public sphere; deliberative communication; hybrid communication strategies; grassroots democracy; urban land conflict

Introduction

Land conflicts have become a critical issue in Indonesia. Monitoring by the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) reports an increase in agrarian conflict cases over the past five years. The year 2024 recorded the highest number of conflicts, reaching 295 cases, a 21.9 percent increase from the previous year (KPA, 2025). Urban land conflicts, in particular, have intensified significantly, with

property development emerging as the second-highest contributor to agrarian disputes in 2023, accounting for 44 cases nationwide (KPA, 2024). This phenomenon reflects deeper structural tensions between community rights and capital interests, particularly in rapidly developing urban areas where land becomes increasingly valuable for commercial development. Urban land disputes differ substantially from rural agrarian conflicts, involving complex power dynamics among residents, government authorities, and private developers within densely populated metropolitan contexts.

The Dago Elos case in Bandung exemplifies these complexities. This dispute involves 331 families facing eviction claims from the Muller family and PT Dago Inti Graha over 6.3 hectares of land inhabited by residents for multiple generations. The conflict has persisted for nine years through various legal proceedings, from District Court to Judicial Review, while residents simultaneously engage in collective resistance through campaigns, demonstrations, and community organizing (Ginting & Lidjon, 2020; BandungBergerak.id, 2024).

Deliberative communication has emerged as a critical framework for understanding conflict resolution processes, particularly where multiple stakeholders with competing interests seek sustainable solutions. Dryzek (2002) defines deliberative communication as inclusive public discussion enabling equal participation, rational consideration of arguments, and collectively legitimate decision-making. However, implementing deliberative principles in urban land conflicts faces significant challenges: power asymmetries, resource disparities, and institutional barriers that constrain meaningful participation by affected communities.

Research on communication in land conflicts has identified various resolution approaches. Studies of agrarian conflict in Indramayu demonstrate the importance of inclusive dialogue, negotiation, and mediation in achieving sustainable resolution (Siregar et al., 2023). Holistic approaches involving legal clarification, community empowerment, and improved communication have proven effective in rural conflict contexts. However, other research tends to focus on strategic communication and social media mobilization in collective resistance (Pratiwi et al., 2019; Pratiwi et al., 2022; Pratiwi & Pangestu, 2022; Mamahit & Pratiwi, 2022). While these studies provide valuable insights, three critical gaps remain.

First, the literature has not adequately explored how deliberative communication practices emerge, function, or are constrained when formal dialogue forums are unavailable or fail. Siregar et al., (2023) study assumes the availability of institutionally-facilitated dialogue spaces but does not examine what occurs when institutions avoid deliberative responsibility. Second, most research concentrates on rural agrarian conflicts, leaving a significant gap in understanding urban community communication dynamics operating within dense metropolitan contexts with distinct bureaucratic complexities (Mustopa et al., 2020; Nayiroh & Ema, 2024). Third, adequate understanding is lacking regarding how communities navigate between resistance and dialogue, or how digital and offline communication spaces interact to create alternative deliberative forums when formal mechanisms fail.

This study aims to analyze deliberative communication practices in the Dago Elos land conflict, specifically examining: (1) how residents construct and maintain deliberative spaces despite structural constraints and institutional failure; (2) what communication strategies facilitate or hinder deliberative processes under non-ideal conditions; (3) how power dynamics shape deliberative practices; and (4) the extent to which deliberative approaches contribute to just conflict resolution in urban settings.

Theoretical Framework

Deliberative Communication in Non-Ideal Conditions

Deliberative communication, rooted in Habermas (2006) theory of communicative action, emphasizes rational discourse as fundamental to democratic legitimacy. The theory distinguishes communicative action, oriented toward mutual understanding, from strategic action aimed at predetermined goals through influence (Habermas, 1984). In deliberative processes, participants engage in reason-giving, where claims must be supported by evaluable arguments, transforming preferences through dialogue (Dryzek, 2002).

However, Young (2002) critiques deliberative theory's idealistic assumptions, arguing that structural inequalities and power imbalances distort communication even in seemingly open forums. Mansbridge et al. (2010) advance this critique by proposing "deliberation under non-ideal conditions," recognizing that real-world deliberation requires preliminary power-balancing mechanisms, including collective mobilization, to create conditions where genuine dialogue becomes possible. This

framework challenges the traditional separation between deliberative communication and contentious politics.

In the Indonesian context, agrarian conflicts demonstrate systematic patterns of deliberative exclusion. Mustopa et al. (2020) documented how social movements in rural agrarian disputes employ consciousness-raising communication strategies when formal dialogue channels fail. Similarly, Siregar et al. (2023) analysis of Indramayu farmers' conflict with Perum Perhutani reveals that effective conflict resolution requires not only legal mediation but inclusive dialogue platforms that recognize power asymmetries between communities and state-backed corporations.

Urban land conflicts in Indonesia present distinct challenges. Nayiroh & Ema (2024) demonstrate how social media has become a mobilization tool when formal institutional channels remain inaccessible to marginalized urban communities. These studies collectively illustrate that deliberative communication in Indonesian agrarian contexts operates under severe structural constraints, necessitating hybrid approaches that combine formal legal advocacy with grassroots mobilization.

Counter-Public Sphere as Alternative Deliberative Space

Fraser (2017) counter-public sphere concept provides crucial grounding for understanding how marginalized communities engage deliberatively. Counter-publics emerge when excluded groups create alternative arenas for deliberation, developing discourses and strategies to engage mainstream publics. These serve dual functions: internally as spaces for developing identities and solidarities; externally as bases for challenging dominant discourses.

Counter-publics are not merely resistance sites but democratic laboratories where communities operationalize deliberative principles, equal participation, reason-giving, mutual understanding—in ways formal institutions often cannot facilitate (Asen, 2000). Recent scholarship extends this to digital contexts, examining how networked technologies create hybrid public spheres integrating online and offline deliberative practices (Sebastião, 2013).

Indonesian agrarian movements increasingly utilize digital platforms to construct counter-public spheres. Pratiwi et al. (2019) virtual ethnography of @jogja_darurat_agraria demonstrates how Instagram functions as an alternative deliberative space where peasants articulate grievances, mobilize solidarity, and challenge state narratives. Similarly, Mamahit & Pratiwi (2022) study of @forumpancoranbersatu illustrates how Instagram enables communities to bypass mainstream media gatekeepers and construct counter-narratives around land conflicts.

Pratiwi & Pangestu (2022) further argue that Instagram serves as a medium of peasant resistance in the digital era, enabling communities to document land seizures, organize collective action, and build transnational solidarity networks. These digital counter-publics complement offline organizing, creating what Pratiwi et al. (2022) term "digital storytelling" as a strategic communication form that preserves community memory while mobilizing broader public support.

These Indonesian cases demonstrate that counter-publics in agrarian conflicts operate through hybrid spaces, integrating physical community forums (*forum warga*) with digital platforms, to maximize deliberative reach and political pressure. This hybridity enables marginalized communities to simultaneously strengthen internal solidarity and project their claims into mainstream public discourse.

Power Dynamics and Hybrid Communication Strategies

Deliberative communication in land conflicts operates within "structural processes" Young (2002), institutional arrangements systematically advantaging certain groups. Economic resources enable legal access; institutional positions provide agenda-setting capacity; cultural capital influences persuasive effectiveness. Habermas (2006) concept of communicative power suggests deliberative processes can generate legitimate authority through inclusive argumentation, yet this requires institutional recognition often absent in conflicts.

Contemporary scholarship recognizes integration of multiple communication modes. Curato (2021) argues deliberative ideals must adapt where power inequalities constrain pure deliberation, acknowledging disruption can serve deliberative functions by forcing elite recognition. Tilly (2004) contentious politics framework explains how collective mobilization operates as political communication, signaling grievance intensity and organizational capacity. Studies demonstrate

communities employ "dual-track" strategies, simultaneously pursuing formal legal channels and informal mobilization (Smith, 2020; Berglund, 2025) reflecting practical adaptation rather than abandoning deliberative principles.

Indonesian agrarian movements exemplify hybrid communication strategies that integrate litigation, mass mobilization, and digital advocacy. Legal aid organizations such as LBH *(Lembaga Bantuan Hukum)* have pioneered "structural legal aid" approaches that combine courtroom representation with community organizing and public advocacy (Mamahit & Pratiwi, 2022). This model recognizes that legal victories alone are insufficient without parallel efforts to build community power and public legitimacy.

Mustopa et al. (2020) document how social movements employ consciousness-raising (*penyadaran*) as a deliberative practice that combines popular education, collective reflection, and strategic action planning. This approach resonates with Freire's pedagogical methods while adapting them to Indonesian contexts of agrarian struggle, where communities must simultaneously contest land claims legally and challenge hegemonic development narratives culturally.

The integration of digital and offline strategies is particularly evident in urban land conflicts. Communities utilize social media for real-time documentation of evictions, coordination of mass actions, and appeals to broader publics, while maintaining offline forums for internal deliberation and consensus-building. This strategic hybridity enables communities to operate simultaneously within formal legal systems and contentious political arenas, maximizing pressure on state and corporate actors.

This study integrates Habermas's deliberative theory, Fraser's counter-public sphere, Young's structural critique, and contemporary hybrid strategy scholarship. The framework analyzes three dimensions: (1) Deliberative Spaces: Examining formal institutional arenas and alternative counter-public forums, analyzing structural characteristics, accessibility, and capacity for genuine deliberation under power-asymmetric conditions; (2) Communication Strategies: Investigating how communities combine reason-giving, legal argumentation, and collective mobilization to maintain deliberative engagement despite institutional barriers; (3) Power Relations: Analyzing how economic, institutional, and cultural power constrains deliberation, and how communities develop communicative power through alternative spaces and hybrid strategies.

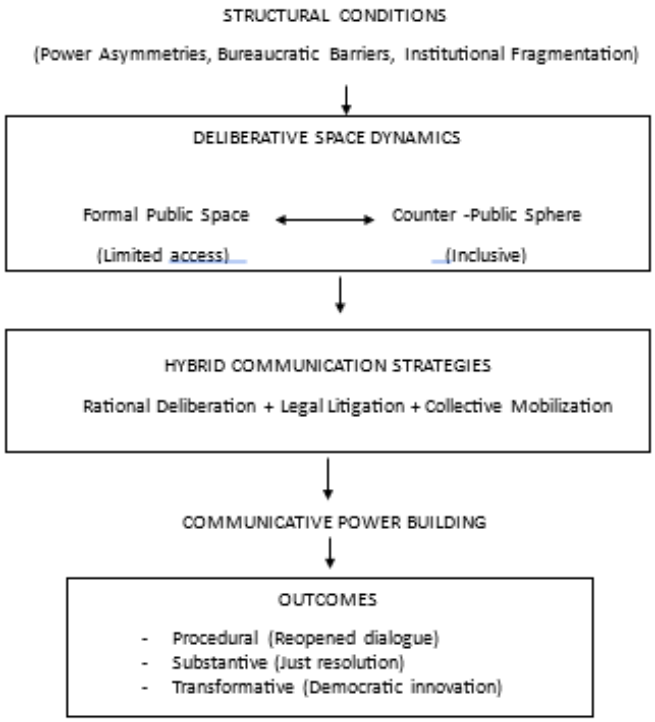
This framework enables examination of how deliberative principles function in non-ideal conditions, how counter-publics serve as democratic innovation sites, and how hybrid strategies bridge deliberative ideals with political realities of urban land conflicts.

Conceptual Model

The following conceptual model synthesizes the theoretical framework, illustrating the relationships between structural conditions, deliberative spaces, communication strategies, and outcomes in urban land conflicts:

The model illustrates a dynamic process where structural conditions shape deliberative spaces, creating tension between exclusive formal arenas and inclusive counter-publics. Communities respond through hybrid communication strategies, integrating rational deliberation, legal litigation, and collective mobilization, to build communicative power.

This power generates outcomes at procedural, substantive, and transformative levels, which feed back into structural conditions. The framework demonstrates that deliberative communication in urban land conflicts is not linear but adaptive, where communities navigate constraints through strategic hybridity while building autonomous deliberative capacities.



Picture 1. Conceptual Model

Material and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a single case study design to explore deliberative communication practices in urban land conflict. Case study design enables an in-depth examination of contemporary phenomena within real-life settings, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are blurred (Yin, 2018). This approach is particularly suitable for deliberative communication, which is inherently contextual and process-oriented, requiring a holistic understanding of stakeholder interactions in their natural environment.

The study adopts a constructivist–interpretive paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed through interaction and communication among actors (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective aligns with Habermas's deliberative communication theory, which conceptualizes communication as a process of meaning-making and legitimacy-building through intersubjective dialogue. The design is exploratory–descriptive, aimed at capturing how deliberative practices unfold under structural power asymmetries. Instead of testing hypotheses, the study seeks to describe and interpret the complexities of communication within an ongoing land conflict.

The research was conducted in Dago Elos, Coblong District, Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia. This site was selected for several reasons: (1) the conflict is ongoing and has lasted for nearly a decade, providing rich longitudinal material; (2) multiple stakeholders are involved, including residents, government authorities, private developers, and civil society organizations; (3) diverse communication strategies have been deployed, from litigation to digital activism; and (4) the urban context offers insights into deliberative practices distinct from those observed in rural agrarian disputes.

Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews conducted between July and September 2025. A semi-structured, conversational format was used to encourage both flexibility and depth, allowing themes to emerge organically. Interviews lasted between 23 and 44 minutes. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interview guide was developed from deliberative communication theory and focused on five areas: (1) experiences of participation in communication forums, (2) perceptions of inclusivity and equality in dialogue, (3) communication strategies employed, (4) barriers and opportunities for deliberative practice, and (5) evaluations of forum effectiveness.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure diverse perspectives across key stakeholders. Four stakeholder groups were represented: (1) Community: represented by A, coordinator of *Forum Dago*

Melawan, with long-standing involvement and comprehensive knowledge of community history; (2) Civil Society: represented by D, a lawyer from LBH Bandung, which applies structural legal aid approaches and advocates hybrid litigation–non-litigation strategies; (3) Local Government: represented by I, a Bandung Kesbangpol official responsible for social conflict management, reflecting institutional perspectives on mediation; (4) Land Administration: represented by J and H, staff at ATR/BPN Bandung, offering bureaucratic and technical views of land administration.

Participants were selected based on four criteria: (1) direct involvement in or management of the conflict; (2) deep knowledge of communication processes; (3) representation of different stakeholder perspectives, and (4) ability and willingness to articulate experiences.

Data analysis followed Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis framework. An inductive–deductive approach was adopted: deductive coding was guided by Habermas's deliberative communication theory and Fraser's counter-public sphere concept as sensitizing frameworks, while inductive coding allowed novel insights to emerge.

The process unfolded in six phases: (1) familiarization with data through repeated readings of transcripts; (2) generating initial codes combining theory-driven and data-driven categories; (3) searching for themes by clustering related codes; (4) refining themes to ensure coherence and distinctiveness; (5) clearly defining and naming themes, and (6) constructing an analytical narrative integrating themes into a coherent account.

To enhance trustworthiness, member checking was conducted with key informants, allowing participants to review interpretations and confirm their accuracy. This process ensured that findings remained grounded in participants' lived experiences and maintained credibility.

Result and Discussion

Fragmentation of the Deliberative Space: The Absence of Formal Dialogue Forums

Field findings reveal the absence of any formal dialogue forum bringing together the residents of Dago Elos and the municipal government. As A, a community leader from *Forum Dago Melawan*, explained:

> "So far, there has been nothing. Absolutely nothing. Not from the local government either." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025).

This statement points to a vacuum of formal deliberative engagement between the community and government authorities. The emphatic repetition "nothing, absolutely nothing" underscores the frustration residents experience in seeking institutional dialogue. This absence is not merely a matter of delayed response but represents a systematic pattern of non-engagement that has persisted throughout the nine-year conflict.

Community efforts to establish dialogue were also obstructed by bureaucratic barriers. As A further noted:

> "Even our letters went unanswered. When we tried to reach out, they avoided us and became increasingly difficult to contact." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025).

The pattern described here reveals active institutional avoidance rather than passive neglect. The phrase "avoided us and became increasingly difficult to contact" suggests deliberate withdrawal by authorities when faced with demands for dialogue. This avoidance creates a communicative impasse where residents possess neither formal channels for voicing grievances nor informal access to decision-makers. The unanswered letters symbolize the closure of even minimal bureaucratic responsiveness.

From the government's perspective, mediation efforts are acknowledged as limited to the lowest administrative levels, such as village or subdistrict offices. As I, a Kesbangpol official, remarked:

> "The village and subdistrict offices have made mediation efforts. But again, this comes down to an issue of… land ownership." (I, Kesbangpol, 2025).

This response reveals how government officials frame the conflict narrowly as a legal-technical matter of ownership documentation, rather than as a broader issue requiring substantive dialogue about community rights, historical occupation, and distributive justice. By reducing the conflict to "an issue of land ownership," the official effectively narrows the scope of what can be discussed in mediation, precluding consideration of residents' social claims or the political dimensions of urban development. The hesitation indicated by the ellipsis ("this comes down to an issue of...") suggests discomfort with this framing, yet the official ultimately retreats to it as justification for limited engagement.

Deadlocked Bureaucratic Mediation

Mediation mechanisms facilitated by state institutions are primarily procedural, lacking any orientation toward deliberative resolution. A representative from the National Land Agency (BPN) emphasized:

> "Mediation can be facilitated by the land office when the case has not yet gone to court... but once it is in court, it becomes the judge's authority." (H, BPN, 2025).

This statement reveals the institutional logic that governs state mediation: the land office positions itself as a procedural intermediary whose role terminates when litigation begins. The sharp boundary drawn between pre-litigation and post-litigation phases reflects a bureaucratic compartmentalization that fragments responsibility for conflict resolution. Once a case enters the judicial system, BPN effectively withdraws, leaving residents without any administrative interlocutor. This creates a deliberative vacuum where neither judicial proceedings (which focus narrowly on legal claims) nor administrative mediation (which ceases to function) provide space for substantive dialogue about community needs and rights.

A similar perspective was expressed by Kesbangpol, which acknowledged institutional limitations:

> "I think the village and subdistrict offices have already made mediation efforts. But again, this is a matter of competing claims… Deadlock can happen, and if musyawarah does not work, the last resort is legal proceedings… and this will take a long time." (I, Kesbangpol, 2025).

The official's acknowledgment that "deadlock can happen" and that *musyawarah* (deliberation) "does not work" suggests resignation to mediation failure rather than commitment to ensuring its success. The framing of litigation as "the last resort" that "will take a long time" reveals awareness that formal legal channels offer no timely or accessible resolution for residents. Yet despite this awareness, the official offers no alternative pathway for meaningful dialogue. The passive construction "deadlock can happen" treats mediation failure as inevitable rather than as an institutional shortcoming requiring corrective action. This reveals a defensive posture where government officials acknowledge limitations without accepting responsibility for creating more effective deliberative spaces.

These findings indicate that formal dialogue forums between Dago Elos residents and local authorities are virtually non-existent. Institutional responsibility is fragmented across multiple agencies (village offices, subdistrict offices, BPN, Kesbangpol), with each defining its role narrowly and withdrawing when conflicts become complex. Mediation is reduced to perfunctory administrative procedures, brief meetings focused on legal documentation, that repeatedly end in deadlock. Residents are left navigating a bureaucratic maze where no single institution accepts responsibility for facilitating sustained dialogue, and where the default response to conflict is either procedural avoidance or referral to lengthy litigation processes inaccessible to communities with limited resources..

Counter-Public Sphere as a Deliberative Space: Forum Dago Melawan as Democratic Innovation

Non-Hierarchical Structure and Equal Participation*:* Faced with the closure of formal channels, residents created Forum Dago Melawan as an alternative deliberative space organized according to principles fundamentally different from state institutions. As A from the Forum explained:

> "Without a hierarchical structure or rigid formation, we eventually reached a shared agreement to establish this collective platform." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025).

The deliberate rejection of "hierarchical structure" and "rigid formation" represents a conscious organizational choice to prioritize inclusive participation over administrative efficiency. Unlike government institutions with their fixed hierarchies and formal protocols, the forum operates as a horizontal space where authority derives from collective agreement rather than positional power. The phrase "we eventually reached a shared agreement" indicates that the forum's structure itself emerged through deliberative process, residents discussed and collectively determined how their organization should function, rather than adopting pre-existing templates. This founding principle of non-hierarchy ensures that every resident, regardless of education level, economic status, or social capital, can participate equally in decision-making.

Deliberative Decision-Making Processes: The forum's commitment to deliberative principles extends beyond structural design to everyday decision-making practices. One informant emphasized:

> "We adhere to the basic principles of democracy, where decision-making must be carried out as a collective choice... every initiative and proposal must first be brought before the community, and only then can it be consolidated through citizens' deliberation." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025)

This description reveals a rigorous deliberative procedure that requires all significant decisions to pass through community-wide discussion. The phrase "must be carried out as a collective choice" indicates mandatory rather than optional consultation, no individual or small group can make decisions unilaterally. The sequential process described, "must first be brought before the community, and only then can it be consolidated", establishes deliberation as the primary mechanism for legitimating action. "Consolidated through citizens' deliberation" suggests that initial proposals may be modified, refined, or rejected based on collective discussion, rather than simply approved or denied. This process ensures that decisions reflect genuine community consensus rather than elite preferences or external pressures.

The commitment to deliberative process is particularly significant given the urgent and high-stakes nature of the conflict. Residents facing imminent eviction might be expected to prioritize rapid decision-making and concentrated leadership. Instead, they have maintained commitment to slower, more inclusive processes that prioritize collective ownership of strategies. This suggests that residents view deliberative process not merely as procedural nicety but as essential to maintaining community solidarity and ensuring that resistance strategies have broad legitimacy. The forum thus functions as both a strategic coordinating body and a space for practicing democratic values internally, even while engaging in contentious struggle externally.

The forum's deliberative practices differ markedly from the procedural mediation offered by government institutions. Whereas bureaucratic mediation focuses on legal documentation and formal claims, the forum enables residents to discuss their lived experiences, emotional concerns, historical attachments to place, and visions for community future. Whereas government mediation is time-limited and episodic, the forum provides ongoing space for residents to return repeatedly to difficult questions, revising strategies as circumstances change. This sustained, open-ended deliberation allows for relationship-building and trust development that brief bureaucratic encounters cannot facilitate.

Structural Barriers to Deliberative Communication

Power Asymmetry and Resource Disparity: The study reveals profound asymmetries of power and resources between the Dago Elos community and their opponents, creating unequal conditions for deliberative engagement. A legal aid representative explained

> "They have large funds, or they have strong political connections." (D, LBH, 2025).

The conjunction "or" in this statement is telling, it suggests that opponents possess either substantial financial resources or political networks, and often both. "Large funds" enable hiring elite

lawyers, conducting extensive legal research, filing multiple appeals, and sustaining lengthy litigation that exhausts community resources. "Strong political connections" provide access to government officials, influence over administrative decisions, and capacity to shape how conflicts are framed in official discourse. The stark simplicity of this observation, "they have" versus the implicit "we don't have", underscores how economic and political capital translate directly into deliberative advantage. Residents cannot compete on these terms; they must rely instead on collective solidarity, moral legitimacy, and the support of civil society organizations like LBH that work pro bono or at minimal cost.

Economic barriers extend beyond litigation to the basic administrative costs of participating in formal processes. As another legal aid representative noted:

> "The down payment fee alone... it costs hundreds of millions." (D, LBH, 2025)

The ellipsis and pause in this statement convey the speaker's recognition of the absurdity, or perhaps the strategic design, of such astronomical costs. "Hundreds of millions" in rupiah represents sums completely beyond the reach of working-class families facing housing insecurity. The phrase "down payment fee alone" indicates that this is merely the initial cost, with additional expenses accumulating throughout the legal process. These financial barriers function as effective gatekeeping mechanisms that exclude poor communities from formal deliberative arenas regardless of the legal merits of their claims. Even if residents possess strong documentary evidence or compelling moral arguments, they cannot present these claims in formal venues without first crossing prohibitive financial thresholds.

The disparity in resources shapes not only who can access formal channels but also who can sustain prolonged engagement. Developers and government agencies can weather years of legal proceedings without financial strain; residents must balance legal struggle with daily survival, often taking loans or selling assets to fund litigation. This temporal asymmetry means that even when residents gain access to formal processes, they face pressure to accept unfavorable settlements simply to end the financial and emotional drain of protracted conflict.

Bureaucratic Barriers and Information Access: Beyond economic disparities, residents face systematic restrictions on accessing crucial information needed to formulate and defend their claims. A representative from the National Land Agency (BPN) explained:

> "The information we provide is limited according to ministerial regulations. There are documents we can share and others we cannot." (H, BPN, 2025)

This statement reveals how bureaucratic regulations serve as gatekeeping mechanisms controlling information flow. The official frames restricted access as a matter of regulatory compliance, "according to ministerial regulations", rather than discretionary choice, effectively deflecting responsibility to higher authorities. The distinction between documents "we can share and others we cannot" creates an asymmetric information environment where state agencies possess comprehensive knowledge of land status, ownership histories, and administrative processes, while residents access only partial, curated information. This informational asymmetry fundamentally undermines residents' capacity to participate effectively in deliberation, as they cannot formulate counterarguments or identify inconsistencies in opponents' claims without access to complete documentation. The passive construction "information we provide is limited" obscures agency, by whom are these limits established, and in whose interests?

From the community's perspective, bureaucratic obstacles manifest not only as regulatory restrictions but as practical difficulties navigating opaque administrative processes. As one resident emphasized:

> "We are blocked by bureaucratic factors and the complexity of government offices." (A, 2025)

The term "blocked" suggests active obstruction rather than mere difficulty, residents encounter barriers deliberately constructed to slow or prevent their progress. "Bureaucratic factors" encompasses both formal rules (filing procedures, documentation requirements, jurisdictional boundaries) and

informal practices (long wait times, unclear instructions, unhelpful staff). "The complexity of government offices" refers to both organizational complexity (multiple agencies with overlapping mandates) and procedural complexity (multi-step processes requiring specialized knowledge). For residents lacking education in law or public administration, navigating this complexity requires assistance from civil society organizations, adding dependency and delay.

These bureaucratic barriers have cumulative effects. Residents must spend months or years gathering documents, filing requests, appealing denials, and navigating administrative hierarchies, time and energy diverted from daily livelihoods. Each bureaucratic obstacle increases frustration and erodes trust in formal processes. When information requests go unanswered or yield incomplete responses, residents reasonably suspect that bureaucracy functions not as neutral administrator but as ally of powerful actors seeking to preserve existing arrangements. The combination of restricted information access and procedural complexity creates what might be termed "bureaucratic exhaustion," where communities give up on formal channels not because they lack valid claims but because the costs of pursuing those claims become unsustainable.

Hybrid Communication Strategies

Rational Deliberation and Evidence-Based Argumentation: The findings show that Dago Elos residents have developed communication strategies combining deliberative reason-giving with confrontational mass mobilization. Residents sought to uphold deliberative rationality by grounding their arguments in data and legal evidence. As one community leader explained:

> "There is a need to gather evidence... to strengthen our case for the second judicial review at the Supreme Court... It should actually be the BPN, as the land authority, that provides clear information on land status." (A, Forum Dago Elos, 2025)

This statement reveals several dimensions of the community's rational-deliberative approach. First, the recognition that claims must be supported by evidence demonstrates internalization of deliberative norms, residents understand that emotional appeals or moral arguments alone are insufficient in formal legal contexts. Second, the specific reference to "the second judicial review at the Supreme Court" shows strategic legal literacy and awareness of procedural requirements at the highest judicial level. Third, the critique that "it should actually be the BPN" providing information exposes the irony that residents must independently gather evidence that government agencies should be providing as part of their administrative duties. This reveals residents' sophisticated understanding that they operate within a distorted deliberative environment where basic conditions for fair argumentation—equal access to information, are systematically denied, forcing communities to compensate through extraordinary collective effort.

Residents developed systematic, quasi-scientific methods for collecting and organizing evidence. As A detailed:

> "We took samples... The first sample was residents with ownership certificates (SHM) who still live in the disputed area... The second sample was those with certificates who are not defendants... The third was defendants who hold certificates but whose land is actually outside the disputed area." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025)

This sampling methodology reveals remarkable analytical sophistication. Residents constructed a typology that distinguishes between different categories of certificate-holders based on residential status and legal standing. The logic is clear: by documenting that (1) certificate-holders remain in the disputed area, (2) some certificate-holders were not named as defendants despite similar circumstances, and (3) some defendants' properties lie outside the disputed zone, residents can demonstrate inconsistencies and potential arbitrariness in the legal claims against them. This evidence-gathering approach mirrors social scientific research methods, systematic sampling, categorization, comparative analysis, adapted for community use. It shows that residents are not merely reacting emotionally to eviction threats but engaging in careful empirical documentation to support rational-legal arguments.

The involvement of legal aid organizations reinforced this evidence-based approach while adding substantive legal interpretation. As D from LBH explained:

> "The concept is that the state holds ultimate authority over land, so when land is not granted as private property, it is under state control... And who should be prioritized? The people who actually occupy it. The fact is, residents have lived on this land since the 1980s, three generations, in fact." (D, LBH, 2025)

This statement demonstrates how legal advocates help translate community experiences into formal legal argumentation. The argument moves from abstract legal principle ("state holds ultimate authority") through normative claim ("who should be prioritized?") to empirical evidence ("residents have lived... three generations"). The legal principle invoked, state control over unallocated land, could theoretically support either residents or developers. LBH's strategic intervention is to argue that this principle should be interpreted in favor of long-term occupants rather than external claimants. The temporal specificity "since the 1980s, three generations" transforms abstract legal debate into concrete historical fact, making visible the deep social roots residents have established. This illustrates how hybrid strategies combine community-generated evidence with professional legal framing to construct arguments that are simultaneously morally compelling and legally credible.

Mass Mobilization: The "Power of the People" Strategy: While maintaining commitment to rational argumentation, residents recognized that evidence and legal claims alone were insufficient to compel institutional responses in a context of systematic exclusion. As one community leader emphasized:

> "We often rely on the power of the people rather than bureaucratic political lobbying... A short-cut, you could say? Yes, that's the approach we always take." (A, 2025)

The phrase "power of the people" invokes a populist political tradition emphasizing collective strength over institutional authority or elite connections. The contrast with "bureaucratic political lobbying" suggests residents' awareness that conventional advocacy strategies, meeting officials, submitting petitions, building relationships with power-holders, require resources and access they lack. The term "short-cut" is particularly revealing: it implies that formal channels constitute the "long route" that is either too slow, too costly, or too unlikely to succeed. By characterizing mass mobilization as a "short-cut," the speaker reframes what might be viewed as radical or confrontational action as pragmatic efficiency, a rational choice given institutional barriers. The phrase "we always take" indicates this is not exceptional behavior but standard operating procedure developed through repeated experience of formal channel failures.

Mass mobilization proved effective precisely because it could bypass bureaucratic gatekeepers and force rapid responses. A recounted a particularly successful mobilization:

> "Eventually we returned to the BPN and organized a large-scale protest there. We demanded that BPN issue the SKPT [Land Status Information Letter] within 48 hours... The head of the BPN office tried to get backup from the ministry... In the end, they simply did what the residents demanded. Thankfully, by the second day, all the SKPTs were issued." (A, 2025)

This narrative reveals the mechanics of how collective pressure operates. The progression from "organized a large-scale protest" to "demanded" to the specific deadline of "48 hours" shows strategic escalation designed to create urgency. The detail that "the head of the BPN office tried to get backup from the ministry" indicates the protest created sufficient pressure that officials sought higher authorization to respond, the collective action elevated the issue within bureaucratic hierarchies in ways that polite requests never achieved.

The phrase "they simply did what the residents demanded" conveys satisfaction at role reversal: residents who had been ignored and avoided suddenly possessed power to compel compliance. The temporal specificity "by the second day" underscores the dramatic contrast between rapid mobilization-driven response and the typical months or years required through formal channels. The expression "thankfully" suggests relief but also awareness that this outcome was not guaranteed, mass action succeeded this time, but its success depends on continuous capacity to mobilize numbers.

Adaptation to Non-Ideal Conditions: Residents emphasized that mass mobilization was never their first choice, but rather a step taken reluctantly when formal channels reached a dead end. As one community representative explained:

> "We honestly never hoped for that kind of effort. Because, as we know, it takes so much extra energy, so much extra time... it's not really the path we wanted to take." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025)

The phrase "never hoped for" conveys disappointment, residents expected or at least hoped that formal institutions would function as intended, making disruptive action unnecessary. The acknowledgment that mass mobilization requires "so much extra energy, so much extra time" reveals that such actions are costly for communities already struggling with economic precarity and housing insecurity. Organizing large-scale protests demands coordination, overcoming free-rider problems, managing risks of state repression, and sustaining participation over time. The statement "it's not really the path we wanted to take" directly contradicts potential characterizations of residents as inherently radical or confrontational; instead, it positions mass action as reluctant response to institutional intransigence. As A further reflected:

> "We were blocked by bureaucratic hurdles and the complexity of government offices... In the end, we proved we could bypass those channels with what? With the power of the people." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025)

The progression in this statement, from "blocked" to "bypass" to "proved", narrates a learning process through which residents developed alternative pathways after formal routes failed. The rhetorical question "with what?" followed by "with the power of the people" emphasizes that collective mobilization represented the community's primary available resource in the absence of financial capital or political connections. The verb "proved" suggests that residents not only achieved specific outcomes but also demonstrated a broader lesson: that collective action can substitute for resources and access typically required in formal deliberative arenas. This reflects strategic learning: communities facing similar structural constraints can observe that mass mobilization offers viable means to force institutional engagement when conventional channels remain closed.

Hybridization: Combining Strategies: Rather than choosing between formal and informal approaches, residents developed integrated strategies that combined multiple communication modes simultaneously. As a legal aid representative explained:

> "From the legal side we continue to pursue the case. But outside of formal law, there are also protests, campaigns, and submissions." (D, LBH, 2025)

The phrase "we continue to pursue the case" indicates sustained engagement with formal legal channels despite their limitations, residents have not abandoned litigation but rather supplemented it with parallel strategies. The conjunction "but outside of formal law" marks the expansion beyond legal arenas into political and public spheres. The enumeration "protests, campaigns, and submissions" lists increasingly formalized actions: "protests" mobilize collective presence and disrupt normal functioning; "campaigns" organize sustained public pressure through media, petitions, and advocacy networks; "submissions" formalize demands through written documents addressing authorities. Together, these create multi-pronged pressure that prevents authorities from isolating the conflict within any single institutional arena. If legal proceedings stall, protests and campaigns maintain pressure; if street actions face repression, legal channels provide alternative pathways.

Cross-platform integration was central to this hybrid approach. As A explained:

> "Through social media campaigns and other kinds of events, that's where we mobilize people." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025)

The pairing of "social media campaigns" with "other kinds of events" (presumably offline gatherings, protests, community meetings) indicates deliberate integration of digital and physical spaces. Social media platforms enable rapid communication, documentation of events in real-time,

appeals to broader publics beyond the immediate community, and construction of counter-narratives challenging official accounts. "Other kinds of events" maintain face-to-face solidarity, enable embodied presence that demonstrates community strength, and create opportunities for internal deliberation that digital platforms cannot fully replicate. The phrase "that's where we mobilize people" suggests these platforms function as organizing infrastructure, not merely for broadcasting messages but for coordinating collective action, recruiting participants, sharing information, and maintaining morale over extended struggle.

Legal aid organizations played crucial roles in linking different strategic elements. As D described:

> "Structural legal aid... it's not just about accompanying the case in court, but also getting involved in other activities, raising the issue outside, drawing participation, and making the public engaged in the case." (D, LBH, 2025)

The concept of "structural legal aid" explicitly rejects narrow courtroom advocacy in favor of holistic engagement that recognizes legal struggles as embedded within broader political conflicts. "Not just about accompanying the case in court" acknowledges that legal representation alone is insufficient when formal legal systems operate within structurally unequal conditions. "Getting involved in other activities" positions lawyers as participants in community organizing, not just professional service providers. "Raising the issue outside" refers to efforts to expand the conflict beyond private dispute into public controversy, making visible what authorities might prefer to handle quietly. "Drawing participation" and "making the public engaged" describe attempts to build broad coalitions that can exert political pressure beyond what legal arguments alone might achieve. This approach transforms lawyers from neutral technical experts into political allies committed to community empowerment.

Institutional Responses to Hybrid Strategies

The effectiveness of hybrid strategies was evident in institutional responses, particularly when mass mobilization forced bureaucratic action. As J from the land office acknowledged:

> "When it comes to accelerating information, honestly it was quite surprising... Thankfully, after yesterday with our friends pushing, communication went well, and now there are no issues." (J, BPN, 2025)

The admission that acceleration was "quite surprising" reveals that rapid information provision was unusual, routine bureaucratic processes typically operate far more slowly. The phrase "with our friends pushing" is particularly telling: the official's use of "friends" to describe protesters softens what was likely confrontational pressure, suggesting either an attempt to maintain collegial relations post-conflict or perhaps genuine sympathy with residents despite institutional constraints. "Communication went well" implies that protest actually facilitated dialogue rather than shutting it down, collective action forced officials to engage substantively in ways they had previously avoided. "Now there are no issues" suggests satisfaction with resolution while perhaps understating the coercive pressure that produced it. Another official offered a more candid acknowledgment:

> "When they come here to protest or demonstrate, what can we do? We just accept it." (H, BPN, 2025)

The rhetorical question "what can we do?" conveys a sense of inevitability or resignation, officials lack effective means to prevent protests or ignore their demands once mobilization reaches certain scale. "We just accept it" acknowledges passive compliance rather than willing cooperation: officials respond to pressure not because they are persuaded by arguments but because collective action creates costs (public embarrassment, operational disruption, potential escalation) that make resistance untenable. This response reveals the power dynamics underlying hybrid strategies: when formal channels fail, mass mobilization creates leverage by making inaction more costly than compliance for officials.

Yet residents remained acutely aware that formal channels continued to exclude them even when hybrid strategies achieved specific victories. As A observed:

> "There is no equality in access to information or in expressing opinions, there's no wider room given by the authorities." (A, Forum Dago Melawan, 2025)

This summary assessment captures persistent structural inequality despite tactical successes. "No equality in access to information" refers to ongoing bureaucratic restrictions that limit community knowledge even when specific documents are extracted through pressure. "No wider room given by the authorities" indicates that authorities respond to immediate demands under pressure but do not voluntarily expand space for ongoing, substantive dialogue. Each victory through hybrid strategies must be fought for individually; there is no transformation of formal institutions to make them genuinely inclusive. This suggests that hybrid strategies enable communities to survive and sometimes win specific battles within structurally unequal systems, but transforming those systems requires more fundamental political change.

Discussion

Crisis of the Public Sphere and Structural Exclusion: The complete absence of formal dialogue forums between Dago Elos residents and municipal authorities represents a concrete manifestation of what (Fraser, 2017) identifies as a *crisis of the public sphere*. According to Habermas (1996), the public sphere should be facilitated by the state to ensure that citizens have opportunities to voice their aspirations on equal footing. The empirical findings demonstrate a systematic failure of this democratic ideal.

The patterns of institutional avoidance and bureaucratic withdrawal observed in this case illustrate what Young (2002) theorizes as *structural exclusion*, where affected groups are denied full access to decision-making arenas not through explicit prohibition but through institutional passivity. When government officials fail to respond to community letters and actively avoid contact, they effectively close deliberative spaces while maintaining a façade of procedural openness.

This dynamic resonates with Fraser's (2017) classic critique of the Habermasian model, which emphasizes the plurality of publics and the emergence of subaltern counterpublics when dominant publics become exclusive. The fragmented institutional responsibility and reduction of mediation to administrative procedure observed in Dago Elos compelled the creation of alternative arenas as counter-deliberative spaces. Similar patterns have been documented in other contexts where formal institutions fail to facilitate meaningful participation, prompting communities to establish counter-publics to generate alternative discourses and mobilize public legitimacy (Bui & Wylie, 2024; Jackson & Kreiss, 2023).

The reduction of mediation to mere procedural steps, as evidenced by BPN's withdrawal once cases enter litigation and Kesbangpol's acknowledgment of repeated deadlocks, reflects what Young (2002) describes as deliberative distortion caused by asymmetric power structures. When the state assumes the role of "procedural gatekeeper" rather than facilitator of substantive dialogue, citizens lose opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes.

More broadly, empirical studies on crisis contexts demonstrate how non-ideal conditions constrain public agendas and reinforce fragmentation, dynamics that parallel the institutional failures observed in this study (Rauchfleisch et al., 2021). The Dago Elos case thus provides empirical evidence that deliberative communication theory must be expanded to acknowledge the role of counter-publics as legitimate and practical deliberative arenas in urban conflicts marked by power asymmetries.

Counter-Publics as Democratic Laboratories: The emergence of *Forum Dago Melawan* as a non-hierarchical, consensus-based deliberative space demonstrates Fraser's (2017) theory of counter-publics in practice. Fraser conceptualized counter-publics as alternative arenas emerging when excluded groups create spaces for deliberation, developing discourses and strategies to engage mainstream publics. The empirical findings confirm that counter-publics serve dual functions: internally as spaces for developing identities and solidarities; externally as bases for challenging dominant discourses.

The forum's rejection of hierarchical structure and commitment to consensus through *musyawarah* operationalizes what Habermas (2006) describes as *communicative rationality*, where claims to validity are tested and legitimized through argument rather than positional authority. This finding supports Asen's (2000) argument that counter-publics are not merely resistance sites but democratic laboratories where communities operationalize deliberative principles, equal participation, reason-giving, mutual understanding, in ways formal institutions often cannot facilitate.

The Dago Elos case can be understood as what this study terms *hybrid deliberation*: an arena that operates internally within the community while simultaneously resisting external bureaucratic and corporate power. This dual function aligns with contemporary scholarship on counter-publics that recognizes their role as spaces of both internal democratic practice and external political contestation.

International comparative cases support this interpretation. Holston's (2009) research on Brazil's environmental movements documented how urban residents created *insurgent publics* to resist discriminatory housing projects, practicing internal deliberation while mounting external resistance. In Canada, Bui & Wylie (2024) study of the *Sidewalk Toronto* case showed how local communities created counter-publics to oppose smart-city projects, producing counter-discourses and demanding equal participation in urban planning. In Eastern Europe, Rauchfleisch et al. (2021) found that institutional breakdown triggered formation of community-based alternative publics when formal arenas failed to function inclusively.

These parallels demonstrate that *Forum Dago Melawan* is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a global pattern in which marginalized urban communities create new deliberative arenas to claim democratic agency. The theoretical implication is that counter-publics represent genuine democratic innovations that can embody deliberative ideals more effectively than state-controlled institutions under conditions of structural inequality.

Structural Barriers and Deliberative Distortion: The severe power asymmetries and resource disparities documented in this study provide empirical validation for Young's (2002) concept of *structural distortion* in deliberative processes. Young argued that formal deliberation cannot occur on equal terms when power and resources are unevenly distributed. The Dago Elos case demonstrates three mechanisms through which structural inequality impedes deliberation.

First, economic capital as exclusionary mechanism. The astronomical legal costs described by informants create what can be understood as financial barriers to entry that structurally exclude residents from formal deliberative arenas. This aligns with Dryzek (2002) argument that deliberation oriented toward substantive justice must account for resource distribution, not merely procedural fairness. When access to legal procedures requires "hundreds of millions" in fees, formal equality before the law becomes meaningless for communities lacking such resources.

Second, political capital as bargaining asymmetry. The concentration of political connections and institutional access among developers and state actors creates what Young (2002) identifies as agenda-setting capacity that enables certain groups to frame issues, control information flow, and determine which voices are heard. The community's observation that opponents possess "large funds" and "strong political connections" illustrates how political capital translates directly into deliberative advantage.

Third, bureaucratic secrecy as information asymmetry. The restriction of land status information justified through ministerial regulations represents what Habermas (2006) identified as a fundamental violation of deliberative conditions. The *ideal speech situation* requires openness of information and equal access to relevant knowledge. When bureaucracy restricts information distribution under administrative pretexts, it creates epistemic inequality that undermines citizens' capacity to formulate and defend claims rationally.

These structural barriers resonate with global patterns of deliberative exclusion. In Brazil, studies of *urban citizenship* reveal how the urban poor face legal and financial barriers in asserting land rights, forming grassroots counter-publics to claim social legitimacy despite losing in formal terms (Holston, 2009). In India, Chatterjee (2004) concept of *political society* explains how urban poor communities are often excluded from formal deliberation due to costs and power relations, relying instead on collective mobilization outside state mechanisms. In Africa, post-transition analyses show formal public spheres becoming accessible primarily to elites with capital, pushing civil society groups to create alternative deliberative arenas (Boone, 2014; Rauchfleisch et al., 2021)

The theoretical implication is that frameworks of deliberative democracy must be expanded to include administrative transparency, economic accessibility, and political equality as fundamental conditions for inclusive public spheres. Deliberation can only function when bureaucracy transforms from gatekeeper to facilitator, when legal procedures become economically accessible, and when political capital is distributed more equitably.

Hybrid Strategies as Adaptive Deliberation: The combination of rational argumentation, legal litigation, and mass mobilization documented in this study demonstrates what Mansbridge et al. (2010) theorize as *deliberation under non-ideal conditions*. Mansbridge and colleagues argue that real-world deliberation requires preliminary power-balancing mechanisms, including collective mobilization, to create conditions where genuine dialogue becomes possible. The Dago Elos case provides empirical validation for this theoretical framework.

The community's strategic hybridity challenges the traditional dichotomy between reasoned deliberation and contentious politics that characterizes much deliberative theory. While communities maintained commitment to reason-giving through evidence collection and legal argumentation, they simultaneously employed mass mobilization to force institutional responses. This integration reflects what Dryzek (2002) terms *vernacular deliberation*, where deliberative principles are adapted to local contexts through communities' own methods and reasoning processes.

The effectiveness of mass mobilization in compelling bureaucratic responsiveness, as demonstrated by BPN's issuance of land status letters within 48 hours following protests, supports Curato's (2021) argument that disruption can serve deliberative functions by forcing elite recognition. The key theoretical insight is that collective action should not be dismissed as non-deliberative but understood as performing a substantively deliberative role under conditions where formal channels remain closed.

This finding also resonates with Tilly's (2004) *contentious politics* framework, which conceptualizes collective mobilization as a form of political communication that signals grievance intensity and organizational capacity. When residents describe mass action as a "short-cut" to bypass bureaucratic obstacles, they articulate an instrumental rationality that recognizes structural constraints while maintaining commitment to achieving deliberative outcomes, namely, reopening communication channels and securing institutional engagement.

The dual-track approach of combining litigation with protests and digital campaigns exemplifies what Fung et al. (2003) describe as *empowered participatory governance*, which recognizes the necessity of integrating legal mechanisms with social mobilization to achieve democratic accountability. The "structural legal aid" model employed by LBH, which extends beyond courtroom advocacy to include community organizing and public education, demonstrates how civil society organizations can bridge formal and informal deliberative spaces.

Contemporary scholarship on disruptive protest supports this interpretation. (Smith (2020) and Berglund (2025) argue that civil disobedience and direct action can function as legitimate components of deliberative systems when they aim to expose injustices and force deliberative engagement rather than bypass dialogue entirely. The Dago Elos residents' reluctant deployment of mass action "only when formal channels fail" suggests that disruption serves as a corrective mechanism within, rather than an abandonment of, deliberative practice.

Comparative cases further validate this hybrid approach. In Brazil and Toronto, communities have successfully integrated litigation with collective mobilization to resist exclusionary urban development projects (Holston, 2009; Bui & Wylie, 2024). These examples demonstrate that hybrid strategies represent practical adaptations to structural inequalities rather than theoretical contradictions.

The theoretical contribution of these findings is threefold. First, they demonstrate that deliberative principles can function in non-ideal conditions through creative adaptation and grassroots institutional innovation. Second, they show that counter-public spheres can successfully implement communicative rationality in local settings while simultaneously engaging in contentious politics. Third, they reveal that hybrid strategies combining reason-giving with collective action create communicative power capable of influencing administrative responses despite structural power asymmetries.

Communicative Power and Institutional Responsiveness: The documented institutional responses to community mobilization, particularly the rapid issuance of land status information

following protests, demonstrate what Habermas (2006) conceptualizes as *communicative power*. Habermas argues that deliberative processes can generate legitimate authority through inclusive argumentation, creating power that flows from collective will formation rather than from administrative or economic resources.

However, the Dago Elos case reveals a critical amendment to Habermasian theory: communicative power under conditions of structural inequality requires not only rational discourse but also credible threat of disruption. The passive acceptance articulated by bureaucrats ("what can we do? We just accept it") suggests that mass mobilization functioned as an enforcement mechanism compelling institutional recognition of community claims.

This finding supports Young's (2002) argument that acknowledging and addressing power inequalities is essential for genuine deliberation, rather than hiding them behind claims of procedural neutrality. The community's ability to force bureaucratic responsiveness through collective pressure demonstrates that political power can be generated from below even when formal institutions remain structurally biased against marginalized groups.

The integration of digital platforms with offline organizing further illustrates how contemporary counter-publics create what Sebastião (2013) terms *hybrid public spheres* that amplify communicative power through multi-arena engagement. Social media campaigns documented evictions, coordinated protests, and appealed to broader publics, while offline forums maintained internal solidarity and consensus-building. This strategic use of multiple platforms maximized both internal cohesion and external visibility.

Implications for Deliberative Democracy Theory: These findings collectively suggest several theoretical revisions to deliberative communication theory: First, genuine deliberative communication in contexts of structural inequality requires acknowledging and actively addressing power imbalances rather than assuming procedural equality. The Dago Elos case demonstrates that when formal institutions fail to provide inclusive forums, communities must create counter-publics that combine internal deliberative practice with external political contestation.

Second, the traditional separation between rational deliberation and contentious politics is empirically untenable. Hybrid strategies integrating reason-giving with collective mobilization represent practical adaptations that sustain deliberative engagement under non-ideal conditions rather than abandoning deliberative principles.

Third, counter-publics should be recognized as legitimate deliberative arenas that can embody communicative rationality more effectively than state-controlled institutions when structural inequalities distort formal public spheres. The success of *Forum Dago Melawan* in implementing consensus-based decision-making demonstrates that grassroots communities can operationalize deliberative ideals.

Fourth, communicative power in unequal contexts emerges not solely from rational argumentation but from the strategic integration of multiple communication modes that create credible capacity to disrupt business-as-usual when institutions refuse engagement.

These theoretical revisions align with recent scholarship emphasizing the need to reconceptualize deliberative democracy for non-ideal conditions (Mansbridge et al., 2010; Curato, 2021), to recognize counter-publics as sites of democratic innovation (Fraser, 2017; Jackson & Kreiss, 2023), and to understand disruption as serving deliberative functions (Smith, 2020; Berglund, 2025).

Table 1. Synthesis of Empirical Findings and Theoretical Implications

Empirical Finding	Theoretical Interpretation	Key Theoretical Contribution
Absence of formal dialogue forums; institutional avoidance	Crisis of the public sphere (Fraser, 2017); Structural exclusion (Young, 2002)	Demonstrates systematic failure of state to facilitate inclusive deliberation
Forum Dago Melawan as non-hierarchical, consensus-based space	Counter-public sphere (Fraser, 2017); Communicative rationality (Habermas, 2006)	Validates counter-publics as democratic laboratories that embody deliberative ideals
Power asymmetries, resource disparities, bureaucratic secrecy	Structural distortion (Young, 2002); Violation of ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1996)	Confirms that structural inequalities systematically undermine formal deliberation

Hybrid strategies: rational deliberation + legal litigation + mass mobilization	Deliberation under non-ideal conditions (Mansbridge et al., 2010); Vernacular deliberation (Dryzek, 2002)	Demonstrates that hybrid strategies sustain deliberation when formal channels fail
Mass mobilization forcing institutional responses	Communicative power (Habermas, 2006); Disruptive deliberation (Curato, 2021)	Shows that disruption can serve deliberative functions by compelling institutional engagement
Integration of digital and offline organizing	Hybrid public spheres (Sebastião, 2013); Dual-track participation (Fung et al., 2003)	Illustrates how multi-arena strategies amplify communicative power

The Dago Elos case ultimately demonstrates that deliberative communication is not merely a normative ideal but a living, adaptive practice shaped by structural inequalities, institutional failures, and grassroots innovations. Communities facing urban land conflicts must creatively navigate constraints through hybrid strategies that simultaneously challenge and engage formal institutions while building autonomous deliberative capacities in counter-public spheres.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that deliberative communication in urban agrarian conflicts in Indonesia operates under structurally non-ideal conditions characterized by power asymmetries, bureaucratic fragmentation, and the absence of inclusive institutional dialogue. Using the Dago Elos land conflict in Bandung as a case study, the research identifies three core findings that are relevant to the broader Indonesian context, where urban land disputes increasingly dominate patterns of agrarian conflict.

First, the study finds that the absence of formal and sustained dialogue forums between communities and state institutions represents a structural failure of deliberative governance. Urban land conflicts in Indonesia tend to be treated as narrow legal-administrative disputes, excluding affected communities from meaningful participation. This institutional avoidance forces residents to seek alternative spaces to articulate claims, negotiate legitimacy, and pursue conflict resolution.

Second, the research shows that counter-public spheres, exemplified by Forum Dago Melawan, function as alternative deliberative arenas. Through non-hierarchical organization and consensus-based decision-making, the forum enables equal participation, reason-giving, and collective will formation. These grassroots deliberative practices often operate more effectively than state-mediated forums under conditions of structural inequality.

Third, the study identifies hybrid communication strategies, combining rational argumentation, legal advocacy, digital campaigning, and mass mobilization as key mechanisms for sustaining deliberation when formal channels fail. Collective action does not negate deliberative principles but instead functions as an adaptive strategy that generates communicative power and compels institutional responsiveness in asymmetrical power contexts.

Theoretically, this study contributes to deliberative communication scholarship by extending deliberative democracy theory to urban agrarian conflicts in the Global South. The findings support the concept of deliberation under non-ideal conditions, demonstrating that mobilization and disruption can perform deliberative functions by reopening blocked communication channels. Moreover, this research reinforces the role of counter-publics as democratic laboratories where communicative rationality can be practiced outside state-controlled arenas. The study also challenges the rigid separation between rational deliberation and contentious politics, showing that hybrid strategies are integral to deliberative systems in structurally unequal settings.

Practically, the findings suggest that local governments, including the Bandung City Government, need to institutionalize inclusive and cross-sectoral deliberative forums in urban land disputes rather than relying on fragmented procedural mediation. For ATR/BPN, the study underscores the importance of transparency and equitable access to land information as foundational conditions for deliberative communication. For civil society organizations such as LBH, the findings validate structural legal aid approaches that integrate litigation with community organizing and public advocacy as effective strategies in urban agrarian conflicts.

This study has several limitations. The number of informants was limited, which may constrain the diversity of perspectives captured. In addition, limited access to the developer's perspective restricts analysis of corporate deliberative practices and power dynamics. Future research should involve a broader range of stakeholders, including private developers and urban planners, and conduct comparative or longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability and transferability of hybrid deliberative strategies across different urban agrarian conflict contexts.

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