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Power Contestation and Shadow Institutionalization: Explaining Healthy City Policy Sustainability in Indonesia

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Abstract: The Healthy City (*Kabupaten/Kota Sehat*, KKS) programme in Indonesia presents a theoretically unresolved paradox: 39.5% of high-achieving districts experience programme discontinuity even under same-party leadership with the programme formally embedded in regional planning documents. This article proposes a novel analytical framework by integrating multidimensional power contestation theory (Lukes, 2005; Foucault, 1980) with gradual institutional change theory (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), drawing illustratively on Semarang City a consecutive Wistara award recipient that failed national verification in 2023 under the same party leadership. Two conceptual contributions are advanced. First, the concept of *shallow institutionalisation* distinguishes programme formalisation (administrative compliance) from programme internalisation (genuine cultural change and community ownership). Second, a KKS sustainability model identifies three hierarchically ordered conditions: formalisation as necessary, internalisation as sufficient, and autonomous collaborative networks as protective. The article argues that conventional policy sustainability theory neglects intra-party elite circulation as a more deterministic explanatory variable than party affiliation per se. The framework contributes to institutionalism and governance literatures and carries practical implications for redesigning collaborative health programmes in decentralised governance contexts.

Keywords: power contestation, shallow institutionalization, policy sustainability, Healthy City, Indonesian decentralization, gradual institutional change.

INTRODUCTION

The Healthy City (*Kabupaten/Kota Sehat*, KKS) programme is one of Indonesia's most significant urban health governance instruments, formally adopted from WHO's (1986) Healthy City concept through a Joint Ministerial Regulation in 2005. Over nearly two decades, participation expanded from 20 districts in 2005 to 177 in 2019. However, data from

the Ministry of Health (2005–2023) reveal a critical paradox: among 190 districts with repeated achievement records, 75 (39.5%) experienced programme deterioration or discontinuity, including districts where leadership remained within the same political party.

The case of Semarang City illustrates this paradox sharply. After winning the highest Wistara award in 2019 and 2021, the city received no award in the 2023 national verification, despite the KKS programme being listed as a priority in the 2021–2026 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) and the mayoral transition occurring within PDI Perjuangan. This directly challenges established policy sustainability theory, which predicts that continuity of same-party leadership, combined with formal institutionalisation, should guarantee programme continuity (Rhodes, 1997; Kooiman, 2003; Pierson, 2000).

This paradox reveals a substantive gap in existing theoretical frameworks. Current approaches are constrained by four key limitations: (1) party-political reductionism, which equates party affiliation with policy continuity; (2) neglect of internal power dynamics operating below the level of formal decisions; (3) a partial conceptualisation of institutionalisation confined to its formal dimension; and (4) unrealistic assumptions about collaborative governance in high-power-asymmetry settings (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019).

This article addresses these gaps through three contributions. First, it develops an integrative analytical framework that combines multidimensional power contestation theory (Lukes, 2005; Foucault, 1980) with gradual institutional change theory (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Second, it introduces the concept of ‘shallow institutionalisation’ as a diagnostic tool for explaining programme vulnerability to leadership transitions. Third, it proposes a KKS sustainability model comprising three hierarchically ordered determinant conditions. These contributions carry both theoretical significance for the institutionalism and governance literatures and practical urgency for redesigning collaborative health programmes within Indonesia’s decentralised governance landscape.

The remainder is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant theoretical literature; Section 3 outlines the research methodology; Section 4 presents the results and discussion, including the empirical paradox, the integrative framework, and the concept of shallow institutionalisation; and Section 5 draws conclusions and outlines implications.

Literature Review

Policy Sustainability Theory and Its Limitations

Policy sustainability theory has traditionally rested on three core assumptions: that party affiliation reliably predicts policy continuity, that formal institutionalisation in regulations and planning documents ensures programme durability, and that collaborative governance arrangements are inherently resilient (Rhodes, 1997; Kooiman, 2003; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). These assumptions, largely developed in Western democratic contexts, face significant challenges when applied to decentralised governance systems in developing countries.

In the Indonesian context, political parties function primarily as electoral machines rather than coherent ideological vehicles (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). Elite circulation within a single party as theorised by Pareto (1935) can produce power configurations no less significant than inter-party transitions, as new leaders bring distinct patronage networks and policy priorities reflecting their particular constituents rather than the party’s platform. This renders party affiliation inadequate as a sole predictor of policy continuity.

Multi-Dimensional Power Theory

Lukes’s (2005) three-dimensional power framework offers a comprehensive analytical tool for understanding how power dynamics shape policy outcomes. The first dimension encompasses visible power—observable formal decision making. The second hidden power

encompasses agenda control: the capacity to determine which issues enter the decision-making arena (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). The third invisible power operates by shaping consciousness and preferences, making the existing order appear natural (Foucault, 1980). Policy failure theory (Bovens & 't Hart, 2016; McConnell, 2010) has predominantly focused on visible power, leaving the hidden and invisible dimensions largely unexplored in sustainability analysis.

Gradual Institutional Change Theory

Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) framework for gradual institutional change offers a typology of mechanisms by which institutions transform without dramatic rupture. Of the four modes identified, two are most pertinent to the post-transition KKS context: drift, in which formal rules remain intact but are no longer implemented in line with their original spirit; and conversion, in which formal rules are retained but reinterpreted for different purposes. These modes are analytically significant because they generate no open conflict and produce minimal formal record of discontinuity.

Institutionalization and Organizational Theory

Institutional theory emphasises that policy sustainability depends on embedding policy within stable structures, norms, and routines (March & Olsen, 1989; Peters, 2019). However, the operationalisation of institutionalisation in empirical research has largely been confined to its formal dimension. Meyer and Rowan (1977) identified decoupling—where formal structures are adopted for external legitimacy yet remain disconnected from core technical activities. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) further described institutional isomorphism as a process that generates structural similarity without necessarily producing substantive convergence.

Collaborative Governance in Developing Countries

Dominant collaborative governance models (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012) assume relatively symmetric deliberation, inter-actor trust, and institutional autonomy from any single leader. In Indonesian local government, however, regional heads exercise dominant authority that typically overwhelms other actors; the Healthy City Forum depends heavily on the regional head's support for resources and legitimacy; and civil society participation tends to be ceremonial rather than deliberative (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Cornwall, 2008; Arnstein, 1969). This asymmetry suggests that collaborative arrangements in such contexts may be fundamentally different from those theorized in Western settings.

METHOD

This study employs a conceptual analysis approach, which is appropriate for developing new theoretical frameworks that address explanatory gaps in existing literature (Jaakkola, 2020). The methodology involves two complementary analytical strategies: critical literature synthesis and illustrative case analysis.

The critical literature synthesis systematically examines and integrates three previously disconnected theoretical bodies: multi-dimensional power theory (Lukes, 2005; Gaventa, 2006; Foucault, 1980), gradual institutional change theory (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007), and organizational institutionalism (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The integration follows an abductive reasoning logic, moving iteratively between theoretical propositions and empirical patterns to generate new conceptual contributions.

The illustrative case analysis draws on Semarang City's KKS programme to ground and illuminate the theoretical argument. Semarang was purposively selected as an 'extreme

case' (Yin, 2018) that most sharply reveals the paradox under investigation: a city that won the highest Wistara award consecutively yet failed national verification under the same party leadership. Empirical data include secondary sources from the Ministry of Health KKS achievement records (2005–2023), Semarang City RPJMD documents (2016–2021 and 2021–2026), KKS Forum activity reports, municipal budget allocation data (APBD) for health-related programmes, and health outcome statistics, including Maternal Mortality Ratio data from the Semarang City Health Office.

Empirical data derive exclusively from secondary sources, which is consistent with the conceptual-analytical design of this study. These include Ministry of Health KKS achievement records (2005–2023), Semarang City RPJMD documents (2016–2021 and 2021–2026), KKS Forum activity reports, and municipal budget allocation data (APBD) for health-related programmes including the District Health Coordination Forum (FKK). Maternal Mortality Ratio data from the Semarang City Health Office were incorporated as proxy indicators of programme continuity. Secondary source validity was assessed through triangulation across three independent document types — official government records, budget documents, and programme monitoring reports — following Bowen's (2009) framework for document analysis. Where discrepancies between reported and documented figures were identified, documentary evidence was treated as the primary reference point, as budget documents (DPA) constitute legally binding governmental records that are less susceptible to retrospective reinterpretation than informant accounts.

Data analysis followed a theory-building approach using pattern matching and explanation building (Yin, 2018) to identify the mechanisms linking power contestation to institutional change in the KKS context. The analytical framework was developed through iterative refinement, testing theoretical propositions against empirical patterns observed in Semarang and in broader national KKS data. The study acknowledges two principal limitations: first, the absence of primary interview data from the current mayoral administration restricts the analysis to observable behavioural and institutional outcomes rather than declared motivations; second, the single-case design, while analytically appropriate for theory development, limits direct transferability to other Indonesian cities where political party composition, inter-governmental relations, or programme maturity may differ substantially. Future research employing comparative case designs across multiple cities would strengthen the external validity of the framework proposed here.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The KKS Paradox: Characterizing the Empirical Phenomenon

The KKS paradox comprises three analytically distinct yet interrelated layers. The first layer concerns systemic discontinuity. A 39.5% discontinuity rate among high-achieving districts is geographically dispersed across North Sumatra, Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, and East Java, indicating structural mechanisms operating across the national KKS system rather than idiosyncratic local factors. The sharp contrast between East Java (149 awards, high consistency) and Central Java (38 awards, low consistency) reinforces this inference, as the two provinces share comparable demographic and fiscal characteristics but differ in governance culture and the depth of programme institutionalisation.

The second layer involves administrative-substantive decoupling. Semarang City received the Wistara award in 2021 but simultaneously saw its Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) surge from 98.6 to 199 per 100,000 live births, far exceeding the SDG target of 70 (Erawati & Putri, 2023). This pattern illustrates decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977): a verification system with 382 indicators—predominantly process-based rather than outcome-based—creates structural incentives for administrative compliance without substantive health

improvement. Table 1 summarises key institutional changes in Semarang’s KKS programme across the two mayoral administrations.

Table 1. Institutional Changes in Semarang KKS Program Across Leadership Transitions

No	CONDITION	PERIOD 2014-2015	PERIOD 2016-2017	PERIOD 2018-2019	PERIOD 2020-2021	PERIOD 2022-2023	PERIOD 2024-2025
1	Institutional	Decree of Mayor Hendra Prihadi Chairman of Krisseptiana	Decree of Mayor Hendra Prihadi Chairman of Krisseptiana	Decree of Mayor Hendra Prihadi Chairman of Krisseptiana	Decree of Mayor Hendra Prihadi Chairman of Krisseptiana	Decree of Mayor Hendra Prihadi Chairman of Krisseptiana but Terminated by Mayor Ita	Decree of the Mayor of Havearita Chairman Prof. Hanifa, 2025 to Change the Mayor of the Election Results
2	Levels of KKS	<i>Padapa</i>	<i>Wiwerta</i>	<i>Wistara</i>	<i>Wistara</i>	Down Into Any Category	<i>Wiwerta</i>
3	Budget in FKK (Kelurahan)	No Budget Yet	DPA 50 Million	DPA 50 Million	Dpa 50 Million	Some are 0 rupiah, some are 25 million, some are 5 million (not priority)	Not Yet

(Source: compiled from RPJMD, APBD, and KKS Forum records, 2016–2023)

Table 1 provides a chronological overview of institutional and award-level changes across biennial periods. To illuminate the mechanisms underlying these shifts, Table 2 offers a systematic comparison of eight governance indicators across the two mayoral administrations, drawing on interview data, budget documents, and official records. Together, the two tables document how a programme at the apex of national achievement deteriorated into functional collapse within a single electoral transition.

Table 2. Comparative Institutional Conditions of Semarang’s KKS Programme Across Leadership Transitions

Indicator	Hendrar Prihadi Administration (2014–2022)	Hevearita G Rahayu Administration (2022–2024)
KKS Forum (FKS) Legal Status	Active with official Mayoral Decree (SK); FKS, FKKS (16 sub-districts), FKK (177 kelurahan) all formally constituted (SK 440/4/2022)	FKS informally frozen without revocation decree, handover ceremony, or official communication; Forum directed to operate independently without institutional support
Inter-Sectoral Coordination Scope	20+ OPDs actively coordinated across all KKS tatanan; Tim Teknis facilitated integration of KKS indicators into RKPd and DPA across sectors	Coordination regressed to Dinkes and Bappeda only (2 OPDs); further regressed hierarchically from Echelon 2 to Echelon 3 officials only; cross-sectoral integration ceased
Tim Pembina–Forum Communication	Two-way, problem-solving oriented; OPDs required to present issues together with proposed solutions; Forum engaged as strategic partner in	One-way or absent; OPDs became silent and risk-avoidant; FKS no longer invited to strategic coordination forums; shifted to symbolic

Indicator	Hendrar Prihadi Administration (2014–2022)	Hevearita G Rahayu Administration (2022–2024)
Budget Allocation for FKK (Kelurahan Level)	city planning IDR 50 million/year per FKK (DPA 2022); consistent allocation across kelurahan enabling structured community activities	compliance 89.8% budget cut (DPA 2023 vs 2022); allocations fragmented: some kelurahan received IDR 0, others IDR 5–25 million; KKS activities classified as non-priority
Community Participation Mechanism	SMD (Social Mapping) at kelurahan level integrated into Musrenbang and RKPD; 1 FKS supervisor assigned to each sub-district; GERCEP youth initiative mobilised during pandemic	Community activities reduced; no FKKS-to-FKK mentoring; participation declined as government invitations ceased; thematic kampung programme discontinued
Regulatory Strengthening	Regional Regulation (Perda) on KKS drafted; budget for Perda preparation included in APBD 2022; KKS integrated into RPJMD 2021–2026	Perda preparation abandoned after leadership transition; KKS retained in RPJMD text only; programme dependent on Mayoral SK without binding regulatory anchor
National Verification Outcome	Swasti Saba Wistara (highest national award) achieved consecutively in 2019 and 2021; Semarang became national KKS reference city	Failed national verification in 2023; programme described by informants as “boleh dikatakan tidak berjalan” (effectively non-functional); recovered only to Wiwerda level in 2025 under new mayor
Institutionalisation Character	Patron-driven: strong formalisation and programme achievement driven by mayoral commitment; social capital accumulated but without autonomous regulatory lock-in	Shallow institutionalisation confirmed: cascade collapse of entire collaborative ecosystem upon patron replacement; dormant (not destroyed) social capital enabled partial recovery under third mayor

Source: Compiled from interview data (14 informants), DPA FKK documents (Kelurahan Panggung Lor 2022; Kelurahan Sendangmulyo 2023), SK Walikota 440/4/2022, RPJMD Kota Semarang 2021–2026, and KKS Forum activity records.

The third layer, and the most theoretically challenging, concerns intra-party discontinuity. Semarang’s transition from Mayor Hendrar Prihadi to Mayor Hevearita Gunaryanti Rahayu, both under PDI Perjuangan, produced programme discontinuity that the party affiliation variable cannot explain. Preliminary data suggest that the transition involved shifts in budget priorities: whereas the previous administration allocated specific budget lines for KKS-related inter-sectoral coordination activities, the successor administration redirected resources towards different urban development priorities, including infrastructure and city branding programmes. These shifts occurred without a formal policy reversal, the KKS programme remained in the RPJMD, through gradual de-prioritisation in budget execution and reduced political attention to KKS Forum activities.

Integrative Framework: Power Contestation and Institutional Change

To address the explanatory gap, this article integrates multi-dimensional power theory with gradual institutional change theory. The integration generates a central argument: power contestation triggered by leadership transitions operates primarily through hidden and invisible power dimensions, and manifests through institutional drift and conversion.

Applying Lukes’s three-dimensional framework to the KKS context reveals distinct operational mechanisms at each level. At the visible power dimension, changes are observable in RPJMD revisions, budget reallocations, and Tim Pembina composition changes. At the hidden power dimension, critical issues such as declining inter-sector coordination quality and reduced forum activity are systematically kept off official meeting

agendas. At the invisible power dimension, a new leader introduces alternative urban development framings that quietly marginalize the ‘healthy city’ narrative—without formal announcement. Bureaucrats absorb the new rationality and adjust their priorities without explicit instruction.

Mahoney and Thelen’s (2010) framework identifies the transmission mechanisms. Institutional drift manifests when the Healthy City Forum remains formally registered but rarely convenes, when the Tim Pembina retains its formal SK but no longer coordinates across sectors, and when the KKS budget line persists at levels insufficient for meaningful implementation. Institutional conversion manifests when a new leader maintains the ‘Healthy City’ label while redirecting it toward city branding rather than community health determinants. Evidence of budget dynamics in Semarang suggests that while overall health spending was maintained or increased, specific allocations for cross-sectoral KKS coordination activities declined by approximately 40% between fiscal years 2021 and 2023, indicating a pattern consistent with institutional drift.

Shallow Institutionalization: A Novel Analytical Concept

The central conceptual contribution of this article is the development of ‘shallow institutionalization’ as an analytical category. The concept builds on but advances beyond existing theoretical work on decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1989), and institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It integrates these insights in a more operationally tractable way for analyzing program sustainability in developing country governance contexts.

Shallow institutionalization refers to the condition in which a program has fulfilled all requirements of formalization—regulations, organizational structures, RPJMD integration—but has not undergone genuine internalization. The program has not become part of bureaucratic organizational identity, has not been integrated into daily work routines, and has not generated sufficient community ownership to sustain itself independently of a single champion leader. Conceptually, institutionalization comprises two analytically independent dimensions: (1) depth of formalization, measured by the extent of codification in formal rules; and (2) depth of internalization, measured by the extent to which program norms have become constitutive of bureaucratic practice and community identity.

A shallow-institutionalized program is acutely vulnerable to leadership transitions because it lacks internal resilience. Bureaucrats implement the program through hierarchical compliance rather than internalized commitment—when directives change, behavior changes. Community members participate through government invitation rather than genuine ownership when invitations stop, participation stops. This explains why the Semarang KKS program, despite robust formal institutionalization (regional regulation, Tim Pembina SK, RPJMD integration, Forum structure), could experience rapid substantive deterioration upon leadership change.

A KKS Sustainability Model: Three Hierarchical Conditions

Drawing on theoretical analysis and empirical evidence, this article proposes a sustainability model comprising three hierarchically ordered conditions.

First, formalisation is a necessary condition. A programme without formalisation, regional regulation, Tim Pembina, or RPJMD integration will almost certainly not be sustainable. However, as the Semarang paradox demonstrates, formalisation alone is insufficient.

Second, internalisation as a sufficient condition. A programme that achieves both formalisation and internalisation, becoming part of bureaucratic identity, implemented through genuine value commitment and supported by robust community ownership,

possesses substantially higher resilience. Internalisation creates ‘bottom-up momentum’ that is not easily extinguished by shifts in top-down priority, and is achieved through extended processes of organisational learning, value socialisation, and shared success experiences.

Third, autonomous collaborative networks serve as a protective mechanism. When a Healthy City Forum possesses genuine autonomy, with resources independent of the regional head, and engages civil society, academics, and private-sector actors based on their own interests, the programme gains protection against leadership transitions. The network can sustain momentum because its survival does not depend on a single political patron.

Implications for Collaborative Governance Theory

The proposed model carries significant implications for collaborative governance theory. In the Indonesian KKS context, the regional head’s role is not merely facilitative (Ansell & Gash, 2008) but determinative. This generates what this article terms ‘hierarchical collaboration’: an arrangement nominally involving multiple actors but substantively controlled by a single patron. Program designs assuming symmetric collaboration will systematically overestimate collaborative resilience when the dominant actor changes. The critical design challenge in high-power-asymmetry settings is engineering safeguards against collaborative collapse during patron transitions.

The broader implication for institutionalism scholarship is equally significant. The formalization-internalization distinction offers a more granular framework than the binary institutionalized/not-institutionalized categorization. The question scholars should ask is not ‘Has this program been institutionalized?’ but ‘How deep does the institutionalization go?’ The answer is far more predictive of sustainability outcomes..

CONCLUSION

This article has developed an analytical framework for understanding the KKS policy sustainability paradox in Indonesia. Three principal findings emerge. First, conventional policy sustainability theory contains four specific limitations that prevent it from explaining why formally institutionalised programmes under same-party leadership experience discontinuity: party-political reductionism, neglect of internal power dimensions, partial conceptualisation of institutionalisation, and unrealistic assumptions of collaborative governance. Second, integrating multi-dimensional power theory (Lukes, 2005; Foucault, 1980) with gradual institutional change theory (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010) reveals that power contestation during leadership transitions operates primarily through hidden and invisible dimensions, manifesting as institutional drift and conversion that erode programme substance while preserving formal appearances. Third, the concept of shallow institutionalisation provides a parsimonious explanation for this pattern by distinguishing between formalisation (administrative compliance) and internalisation (genuine cultural change and substantive community ownership). Descriptively, it explains why formally robust programmes experience substantive discontinuity. Prescriptively, it indicates that sustainability efforts cannot stop at formalisation but must engage the far more difficult dimension of internalisation — changing bureaucratic culture, building collective identity around programme values, and cultivating genuine community ownership.

The practical reform implications converge on three priorities. First, developing institutionalisation mechanisms that promote genuine internalisation through inter-regional KKS learning communities, outcome-based incentive systems, and cultivation of professional identities among KKS practitioners. Second, redesigning community participation to foster genuine ownership rather than ceremonial invited spaces, including delegated decision-making authority and community-controlled budgeting. Third, building collaborative networks with sufficient financial and institutional autonomy from the regional head, through

diversified funding sources and legally mandated governance structures to survive leadership transitions. For the national verification system specifically, the findings suggest reforming the 382-indicator assessment to weight outcome-based measures more heavily and introduce institutional resilience indicators that assess programme vulnerability to leadership transitions.

The most pressing research agenda is the empirical testing of the proposed sustainability model through systematic multi-case comparative research examining districts with varying KKS trajectories. Such research should develop rigorous operationalisations of the shallow institutionalisation concept, transforming it into a diagnostic instrument deployable by regional governments and national programme evaluators. Comparative studies with healthy city programmes in similarly decentralised governance contexts — the Philippines, Thailand, and Brazil, would test the generalisability of the framework, while longitudinal research tracking the same districts through multiple leadership transitions would strengthen its causal claims.

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