

## Research Article

# From Clientelistic Governance to Embedded Autonomy: A Transformative Patron-client Approach in Pangkep Regency Development

Muchlis\* and Muh. Akmal Ibrahim

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Science. Hasanuddin University, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

## Abstract.

This study analyzes the opportunities for transformation of patron-client relations from clientelistic governance to embedded autonomy in the context of Pangkep Regency development. Using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, Musrenbang observations, and document analysis, the study identifies patron-client typologies in the maritime, mining, and island sectors and their manifestations in regional development administration. The results of the study indicate that the pattern of development project allocation and decision-making is strongly influenced by patronage networks, but has the potential to be transformed through the formalization of social networks. The institutionalization of the *punggawa-sawi* system in coastal management and the integration of informal figures in participatory planning create a hybrid governance structure that combines the strength of traditional relations with modern administrative principles. The developed embedded autonomy model results in increased effectiveness of policy implementation and more substantive community participation. This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on the transformation of social structures in regional development and offers a practical approach to utilizing local social capital in strengthening governance capacity without ignoring traditional wisdom.

**Keywords:** patron-client, embedded autonomy, clientelistic governance

## 1. Introduction

The patron-client phenomenon has become a fundamental characteristic in the dynamics of Indonesian development, especially at the regional level. Patron-client relations, which are rooted in traditional social structures, tend to transform into clientelistic governance in the context of modern public administration. In Pangkep Regency, this pattern is manifested in various strategic sectors, creating challenges for the implementation of rational-legal public administration principles. Although the official document of the 2024 RKPD emphasizes the focus on strengthening public services, developing democracy, and order, its implementation is faced with the reality of clientelistic governance. Criticism of clientelistic governance has become mainstream in public administration

Corresponding Author: Muchlis;  
email: muchlis\_pkm@gmail.com

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discourse, seen as an anomaly that hinders the rationality of Weberian bureaucracy and undermines the principle of universalism in public services[1]. Empirical evidence in Pangkep shows a tension between ideals and real practices. In discourse, the bureaucracy often emphasizes Musrenbang as a “meeting point” between citizen needs and government plans, but all bureaucratic actors acknowledge the existence of “interests that cannot be accommodated” in the planning process. Low public trust prompted the District Government to launch the Japrima application, indicating a significant gap in participation. Although statistics show progress—the poverty rate has decreased from 13.40% (2023) to 12.41% (2024) and unemployment from 5.05% to 3.98%—the legitimacy of this achievement is questionable given indications of the dominance of elite interests in planning. The phenomenon of “internal proposal selection” before being submitted to a higher level is consistent with the pattern of clientelistic governance, where power is exercised to maintain loyalist networks rather than serve the public interest.

The eliminative approach to patron-client relations often fails to consider the socio-cultural dimensions and systemic functions. Administrative reforms that ignore the fact that patron-client relations have become an adaptive mechanism for society in accessing resources [2]tend to be ineffective, creating theoretical and practical dilemmas.

The concept of embedded autonomy [3] offers an alternative framework that advocates structural transformation that combines bureaucratic autonomy with strategic involvement in community networks. Rather than ignoring Deputy Regent Syahban Sammana’s call for proposals and funding for village activities to “be processed according to a transparent, participatory, and democratic system,” this approach institutionalizes this principle in a hybrid structure. This research starts from the premise that the transformation of patron-client towards embedded autonomy is not merely a normative imperative, but a pragmatic need for regional development. By analyzing clientelistic governance in Pangkep, including the dynamics of Musrenbang, and identifying its transformation potential, this research contributes to the development of a hybrid governance model that leverages the strengths of local social structures while promoting the principles of good governance.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Clientelism on Governance

Clientelistic governance is a pattern of political exchange in which state resources are selectively distributed in return for political support [2]. This phenomenon has attracted significant attention in public administration, political science, and development studies. The conceptual foundations of clientelism emerged from anthropological studies of traditional societies [4] but gained prominence in political analysis through works examining Southern Europe and Latin America[5]. Clientelism was originally characterized as a pre-modern political arrangement that was expected to decline with modernization [6]. However, contemporary scholarship recognizes its continued adaptability in modern democratic systems [7]. In public administration, clientelistic governance manifests itself through systematic deviations from Weberian bureaucratic principles. Formal-legal administrative structures often coexist with informal patronage networks, creating what [8]calls “embedded autonomy.” This hybridity challenges conventional governance models that assume a clear separation between the political and administrative spheres [9]. Empirical studies document its various manifestations across regions. In Southeast Asia, [10]identified “robbery capitalism” where business elites control administrative processes. Latin American studies highlight how clientelism evolves through democratic transitions[11],while African scholarship examines the institutional entrenchment of neopatrimonialism (van de Walle, 2001). Patterns of resource allocation are a major focus in the literature. [12] show how targeted distribution of public services creates political dependency, while [13] document infrastructure development biased toward supportive constituencies. Clientelistic governance significantly impacts the effectiveness of public service delivery through what [14] describes as “boy jobs” – administrative appointments based on political loyalty rather than merit. Recent theoretical developments emphasize the systemic nature of clientelistic governance that goes beyond patron-client relationships. Berenschot and [15] for “clientelistic policy networks” that encompass multiple actors across state-society boundaries. Similarly, [16] proposes to examine clientelism as an institutionalized system rather than a discrete transaction. The persistence of clientelistic governance despite administrative reforms presents a theoretical puzzle. [17] attribute this resilience to complementarities between formal and informal institutions. Reform efforts often fail when they ignore these embedded power relations [18]. [19] documents cases where decentralization inadvertently strengthens

local patronage networks rather than increasing accountability. Digital governance introduces new dynamics to clientelistic relations. [20], [21] examines how technological innovations can strengthen or disrupt traditional patronage, while [22] shows how digital service delivery can bypass intermediaries that traditionally control access to resources. Future research directions include examining client resilience under different institutional settings [23] and exploring potential transition pathways to programmatic governance [7]. The persistent adaptability of client governance across contexts suggests its continued relevance for understanding public administration challenges in developing democracies [24].

## 2.2. Embedded Autonomy

The concept of embedded autonomy was introduced by [3] as an essential principle of effective state governance, describing the balance between institutional coherence and social integration. Evans argued that the state needs to have strong bureaucratic autonomy while remaining embedded in social networks, creating the capacity for collective mobilization and development coordination. In contrast to neoliberal approaches that emphasize state withdrawal [19], embedded autonomy advocates strategic state involvement balanced with community involvement [19], [25]. The implementation of this concept is seen in case studies of East Asian countries, where public administrations maintain independence while developing close networks with the private sector [26], [27]. [28] extends this argument by highlighting that the effectiveness of public policy depends on the state's capacity to navigate "social boundaries" while maintaining internal coherence. In the context of local administration, [29] shows how governments that successfully integrate informal community networks into formal policy implementation processes achieve better development outcomes. Furthermore, the concept offers a middle ground between rigid Weberian bureaucracy and clientelistic governance, enabling what [30] identified as "polycentricity" — a diversity of decision-making centers interacting within a shared framework of rules. A recent study by Berenschot (2018) demonstrates that in the context of developing countries, embedded autonomy enables the transformation of traditional social structures into governance assets rather than obstacles, offering an alternative route to development that combines institutional strengths with local wisdom.

### 3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the transformation of patron-client patterns in the context of Pangkep Regency development. Data collection was carried out through triangulation methods including: (1) in-depth interviews with 35 key informants including bureaucratic elites (regents, deputy regents, Bappelitbangda officials), *punggawa-sawi* figures, mining business actors, and community leaders in the island region; (2) participatory observation at the Musrenbang forum at three levels (village, sub-district, district) to observe the dynamics of decision-making; (3) analysis of policy documentation, RKPD reports, and development project implementation reports for the 2019-2024 period; and (4) focused group discussions involving multiple parties to validate initial findings. Data analysis used an interpretive approach with thematic coding techniques to identify clientelistic governance patterns and transformation mechanisms towards embedded autonomy. The validity of the study was strengthened through member checking and peer debriefing by presenting the results of the analysis to the informant group to ensure accurate interpretation.

### 4. Result And Discussion

#### 4.1. Tipologi Relasi Patron-Klien di Kabupaten Pangkep

The results of the study show that the Patron-Client relationship in Pangkep is manifested in four typologies: (1) Economic: *punggawa-sawi* in fisheries and trade oligopoly; (2) Political: politicians-constituents in electoral mobilization; (3) Bureaucracy: senior officials-staff in loyalty-based placement; (4) Cultural: traditional/religious figures-followers in traditional legitimacy.

Based on Table 1, the maritime sector shows a high dependency relationship between the *punggawa-sawi* through an unequal profit-sharing system and debt control. The mining sector shows a moderate dependency between company and worker patronage through licensing, focusing on pro-industry policies. The island sector reflects geographic isolation that creates extreme dependency on traders/community leaders who control logistics, resulting in unequal island development. All three sectors show a general pattern of asymmetric resource exchange, but with different intensities and manifestations based on geographic and economic characteristics.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of Patrons-Clients in Pangkep Regency.

Aspects	Maritime Sector	Mining Sector	Island Sector
Patron Identity	Punggawa (vessel/capital owners)	Mining companies, contractors	Wholesale traders, community leaders
Client Identity	Sawi (small fishermen)	Workers, local subcontractors	Island communities, small fishermen
Exchange Basis	Access to fishing gear, capital, market	Employment, projects, CSR	Access to transportation, distribution of goods
Dependency Patterns	High (unbalanced profit sharing system)	Moderate (economic dependence)	Very high (geographic isolation)
Control Mechanisms	Debt, monopoly of market access	Permits, project access	Logistics and information monopoly
Political Manifestations	Mobilization of votes in coastal areas	Pro-industry policy support	Government program intermediaries
Development Impacts	Allocation of fisheries infrastructure	Development priorities in mining areas	Island development inequality

Furthermore, regarding the mapping of actors and resource distribution, it is a critical analysis in understanding the dynamics of patronage in Pangkep Regency. This mapping identifies the main actors in the patron-client relationship and describes the flow patterns of economic, political, and social resources between them. Through this mapping, the asymmetric power structure that determines access to development resources is revealed, where patrons from various sectors (maritime, mining, islands) play the role of gatekeepers who control the distribution of benefits. This analysis is the foundation for understanding how informal networks influence the implementation of formal policies and identifying intervention points for transformation towards embedded autonomy.

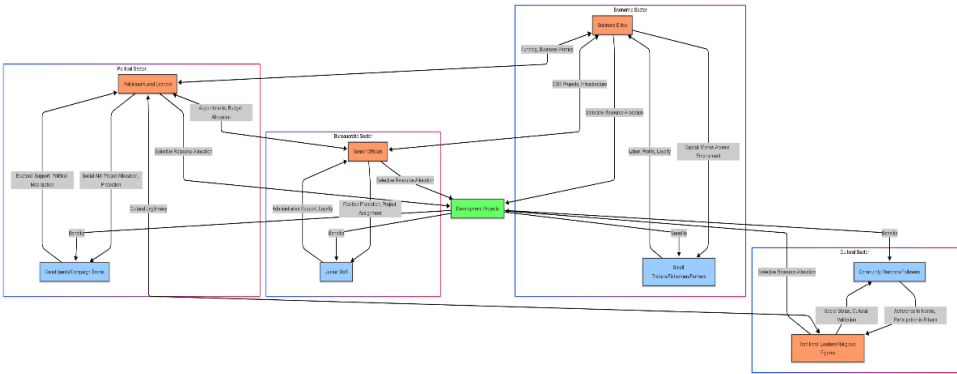


Figure 1: mapping of actors and resource distribution (Appendix 1).

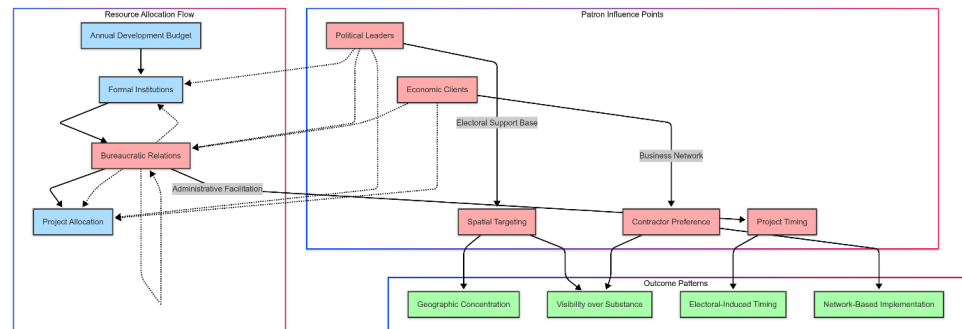
Patron-client networks in Pangkep Regency (Fig 1) illustrate the complex structure of power relations and resource distribution. Several key points of analysis: Cross-Sector

Integration: The diagram shows that economic, political, bureaucratic, and cultural elites do not operate separately, but rather form an integrated network. This cross-sector resource flow shows how patronage creates a shadow governance system that operates parallel to the formal structure. Asymmetric Resource Flows: There is a clear imbalance in resource distribution, where patrons control access to capital, projects, positions, and social legitimacy. This pattern maintains the structure of dependency. Development Selectivity: The flow of development resources that passes through the patron's "filter" shows that the implementation of development programs tends to be selective and distorted to benefit the patron-client network. Exchange Mechanisms: The diagram reveals different exchange logics across sectors (economic: capital-labor, political: favor-votes, bureaucratic: promotion-loyalty, cultural: status-compliance) but with a similar basic pattern of asymmetric exchange. Transformation Potential: To transform patronage towards embedded autonomy, interventions must target the intersections between sectors, especially how development projects are allocated and how accountability is structured. The main challenge is how to institutionalize patron-client relationships without eliminating their social function, while reducing the power asymmetry that hinders inclusive development in Pangkep Regency.

## **4.2. Manifestation of Clientelistic Governance in Regional Development Administration**

### **4.2.1. Development project allocation patterns**

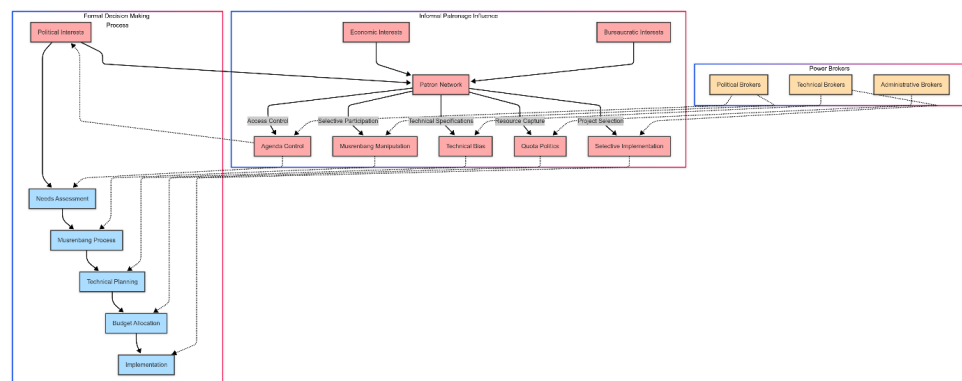
Development project allocation patterns in clientelistic governance in Pangkep Regency show selectivity based on patronage relations. Infrastructure projects, social assistance, and empowerment programs are allocated with priority to areas with political support bases or patron socio-economic networks. This allocation is characterized by an imbalance in geographical distribution with concentration in supporting areas, a preference for projects with high visual impact but low substance, and an increasing intensity cycle approaching regional head elections. Patronage patterns are also evident from the selection of project implementers who come from the circle of patron economic clients and the fragmentation of development programs into small units that facilitate selective distribution of benefits to patron-client networks (Fig 2).



**Figure 2:** Development project allocation patterns (Appendix 2).

#### 4.2.2. Patronage-based decision-making mechanisms

The decision-making process for development in clientelism practices is strongly influenced by patronage networks through several systematic mechanisms. The determination of the policy agenda is biased towards prioritizing the interests of the patron elite, while the musrenbang forum, which should be participatory, is often manipulated into merely providing formal legitimacy for decisions that have been taken through informal channels. Patronage intervention also occurs in the determination of technical specifications that are directed to benefit certain clients, supported by considerations of “political quotas” in the budget-setting process. This entire system is facilitated by the role of “brokers” who act as liaisons between the patron network and the formal administrative system (Fig 3).



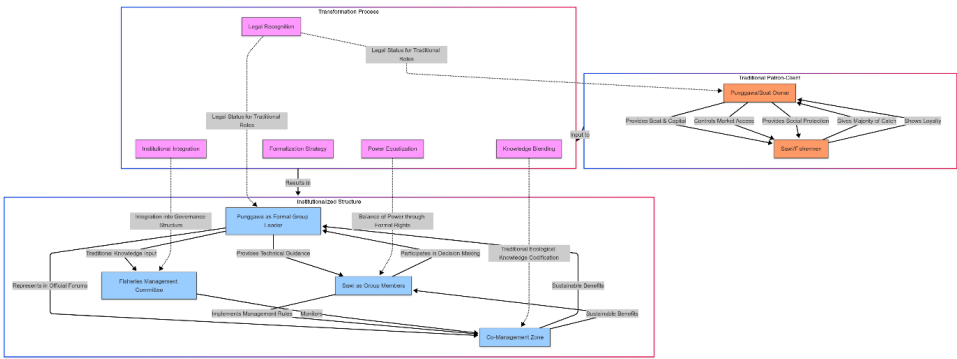
**Figure 3:** Patronage-based decision-making mechanisms (Appendix 3)



### 4.3. Structural Transformation: Formalization of Patronage Networks

#### 4.3.1. Institutionalization of punggawa-sawi in coastal resource management

The punggawa-sawi system in Pangkep can be transformed into a formal coastal management structure through several institutionalization mechanisms. The formation of a Joint Business Group (KUB) based on punggawa-sawi relations is the first step, followed by the legalization of the role of punggawa as the leader of the fisheries zone management group that is formally recognized. This process includes the formalization of traditional ecological knowledge into zoning regulations, the transformation of the conventional profit-sharing system into a more collaborative and equitable economic structure, and the integration of punggawa in the local Fisheries Management Committee (KPP). This transformative approach creates a hybrid structure that is able to maintain social cohesion based on traditional relations while improving the inequality of relations that have so far disadvantaged sawi groups (Fig 4).

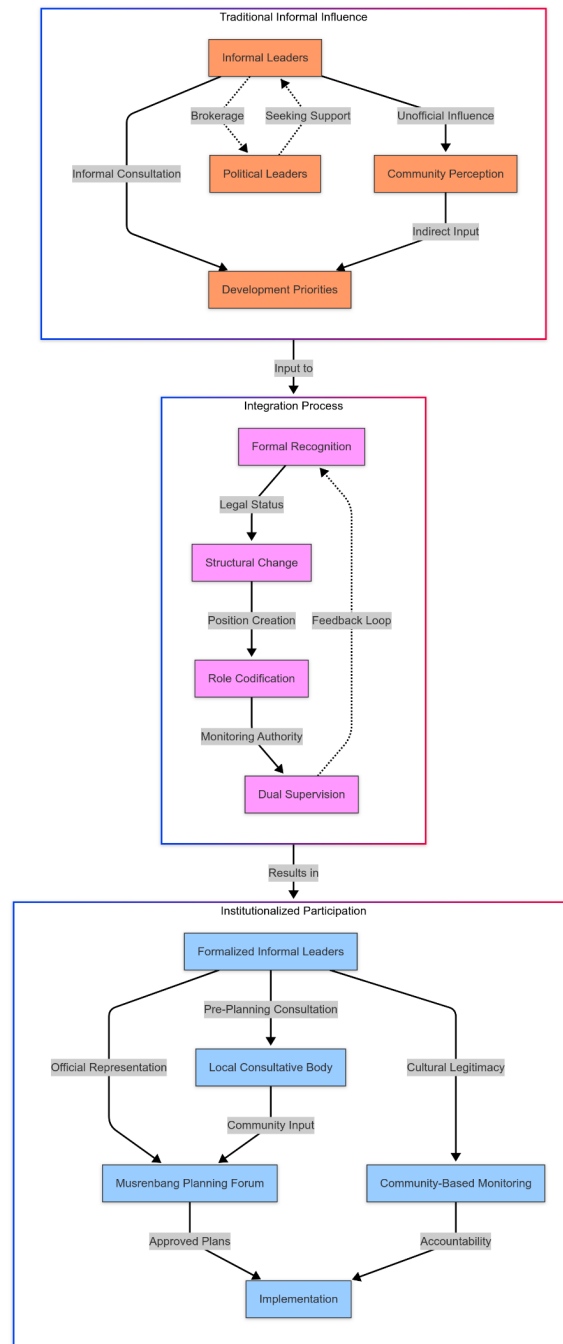


**Figure 4:** Institutionalization of punggawa-sawi in coastal resource management (Appendix 4).

#### 4.3.2. Integration of informal Actor in participatory planning

Informal figures (customary, religious, community) are integrated into the formal planning system of Pangkep Regency through various institutionalization mechanisms. Formalization of the role of representatives of informal figures in the musrenbang forum is the first step, supported by the establishment of the Inter-Figure Communication Forum (FORKAT) as an official forum for communication and coordination. This system is strengthened by a community-based pre-planning consultation mechanism that ensures that community aspirations are accommodated before formal planning begins.

To ensure accountable implementation, institutionalization of community-based monitoring is carried out with informal figures as supervisors, as well as legislation on the role of figures in the Village/Sub-district Development Agency. This formalization process creates dual legitimacy that combines the power of formal bureaucracy with traditional authority (Fig 5).

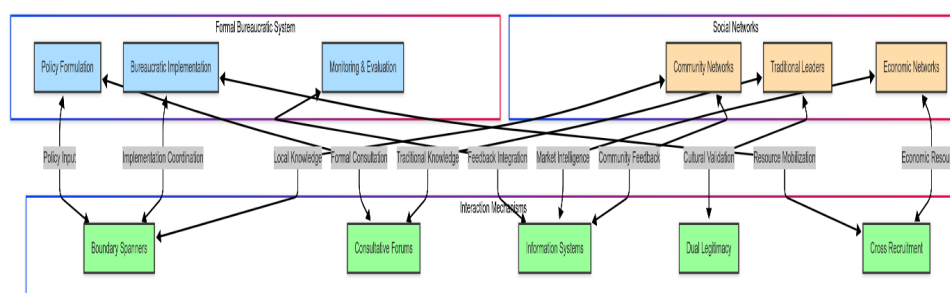


**Figure 5:** Integration of informal figures in participatory planning (Appendix 5).

#### 4.4. Embedded Autonomy Model in Pangkep Context

#### 4.4.1. Bureaucracy-social network interaction mechanisms

Interaction mechanisms in Pangkep Regency function as a vital bridge between the formal administrative system and informal social networks. These interactions are operationalized through “boundary spanners” – government officials with dual membership in formal structures and social networks – who facilitate information flows and build trust. Structured consultative forums create regular dialogue spaces between bureaucracy and social network leaders, supported by a two-way information system that manages the flow of knowledge from the community to the policy process. Dual policy legitimacy ensures that decisions are approved through bureaucratic processes and validated by informal leaders, while cross-recruitment strengthens connectivity by involving social network figures in official positions. These mechanisms allow the bureaucracy to maintain structural autonomy while interacting productively with local social networks (Fig 6).



**Figure 6:** Bureaucracy-social network interaction mechanisms (Appendix 6).

#### 4.4.2. Hybrid governance structure

The hybrid governance structure in Pangkep Regency combines formal-informal elements in an integrated governance framework. Layered authority combines formal-legal authority with socio-cultural legitimacy, creating a more solid basis for decision-making. Complementary accountability ensures accountability not only to formal mechanisms but also to the community, while multi-actor decision-making formally involves bureaucratic, political, economic, and social figures in a deliberative process. This structure is supported by adaptive regulations that allow flexibility in the application of rules based on local contexts, as well as collaborative resource management that divides roles in managing public assets between formal and informal entities. This hybrid approach

creates governance that is formally organized but socially rooted in the realities of society (fig 7).

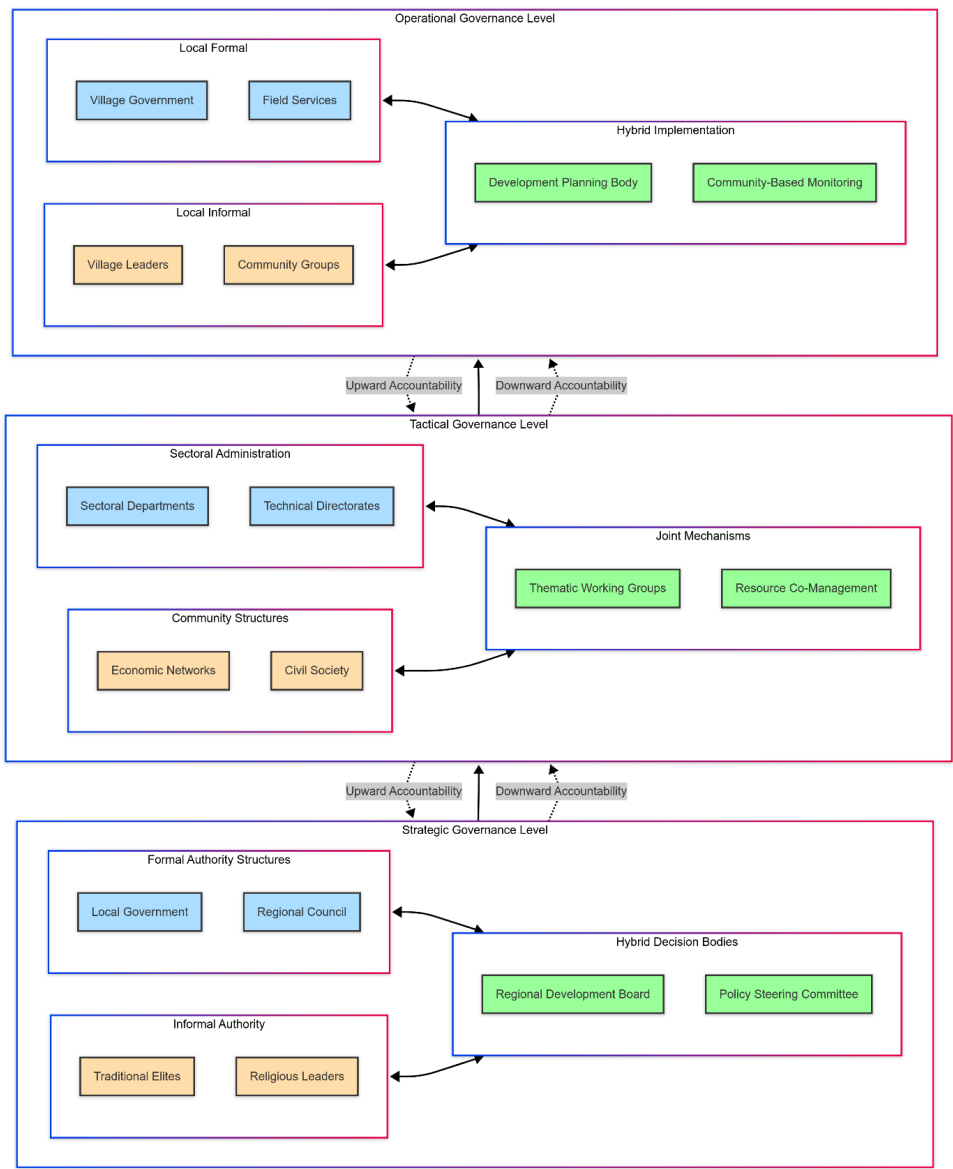


Figure 7: Hybrid governance structure (Appendix 7).

4.5. Impact of Transformation on Development Effectiveness. Theoretical analysis

4.5.1. Policy implementation achievement indicators

The transformation of patron-client relations towards embedded autonomy resulted in a significant increase in policy implementation achievement indicators in Pangkep Regency. In the theoretical framework of policy implementation, this change creates a

higher “policy-implementation congruence”, where the gap between policy formulation and implementation is substantially reduced. [31] identified that successful implementation depends on the alignment of the interests of implementing actors with policy objectives, where the institutionalization of patronage networks creates a more cohesive implementation alliance. The formation of hybrid structures also strengthens the institutional capacity of local governments through a combination of bureaucratic coherence and embeddedness in social networks, as conceptualized by [32] in the developmental state theory. Another important aspect is the reduction in transaction costs in the implementation process, in line with [3] institutional economic theory which highlights how the formalization of informal rules reduces uncertainty and increases the predictability of the system. Structured bureaucratic-social network interaction mechanisms facilitate more effective policy coordination, creating what [33] call “collaborative advantage” in governance. Empirical indicators of this transformation are seen in the increase in the rate of completion of development projects, the conformity of implementation to the initial plan, the efficiency of budget use, and the reduction of implementation conflicts. Interestingly, case studies in other areas with similar characteristics show that indicators of successful implementation are not only measured by conventional administrative parameters, but also by the level of alignment with community expectations and the sustainability of development impacts, me

#### **4.5.2. Changes in Community Participation Patterns**

The transformation of the patron-client structure in Pangkep Regency resulted in fundamental changes in community participation patterns, shifting from clientelistic mobilization to substantive programmatic involvement. [34] identify this phenomenon as a transition from “contingent exchange” where participation is conditioned by specific rewards, to “policy-oriented linkage” based on shared long-term programmatic interests. Hybrid governance structures create more inclusive deliberation spaces, enhancing what Dryzek (2002) conceptualizes as the “deliberative quality” of the public policy process, where rational exchange of arguments can occur despite the context of unequal power relations. An important dimension of this transformation is the strengthening of community ownership of the development process, [35] collective action theory of how the institutionalization of local norms and leadership enhances the sustainability of shared resource management. The formalization of patron-client relations also

facilitates a co-production model in public service delivery, [36] as “institutionalized co-production” where communities act as co-implementers rather than passive recipients. This change in participation patterns is empirically evident from the increased presence and active participation of citizens in planning forums, the diversification of participants based on socio-economic backgrounds, the emergence of community-based initiatives connected to formal programs, and the transformation of development discourse to be more oriented towards substantive policies. [37], [38] call this phenomenon “spaces of democratic engagement” where citizens are not only present but also have the capacity to meaningfully influence public decisions..

## 5. Conclusion

This study reveals that clientelistic governance practices have been deeply rooted in the development administration of Pangkep Regency, manifested through selective project allocation patterns and decision-making mechanisms dominated by patron-client networks. However, this study goes beyond conventional criticism by identifying the potential for transforming patronage into a development asset through the concept of embedded autonomy. The institutionalization of the *punggawa-sawi* system in coastal resource management and the integration of informal figures in participatory planning suggest that traditional social structures can be reconfigured to support, rather than hinder, effective governance. The resulting hybrid governance model creates a productive balance between bureaucratic autonomy and engagement in social networks. Bureaucratic-social network interaction mechanisms such as boundary spanners, structured consultative forums, and dual policy legitimacy facilitate more coherent and adaptive policy implementation. The impact of this transformation is seen in the improvement of policy implementation achievement indicators and changes in community participation patterns from clientelistic mobilization to programmatic involvement. The research findings produce important theoretical implications that enrich the public administration discourse on state-society relations in the context of developing countries. The deadlock of the formal-informal dichotomy in administrative reform can be overcome through a transformative approach that recognizes the complexity of local social structures. In practice, this study offers an implementable model for regions with similar characteristics to navigate the transition from clientelistic governance to more inclusive and effective governance without creating social disruption. Further research can explore the dynamics of transformation in the long term and develop quantitative

indicators to measure the impact of the embedded autonomy model on development outcomes in a more measurable manner.

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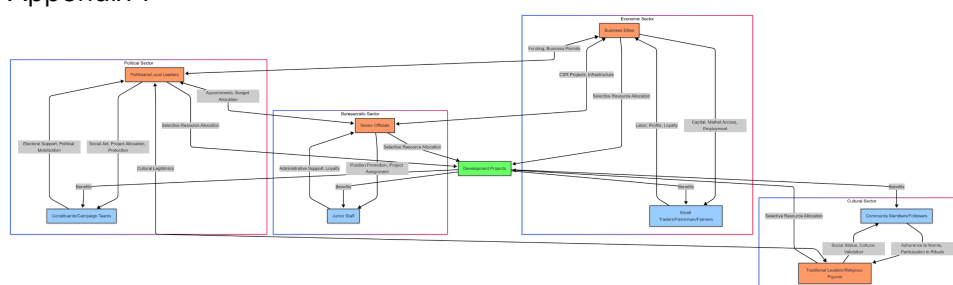
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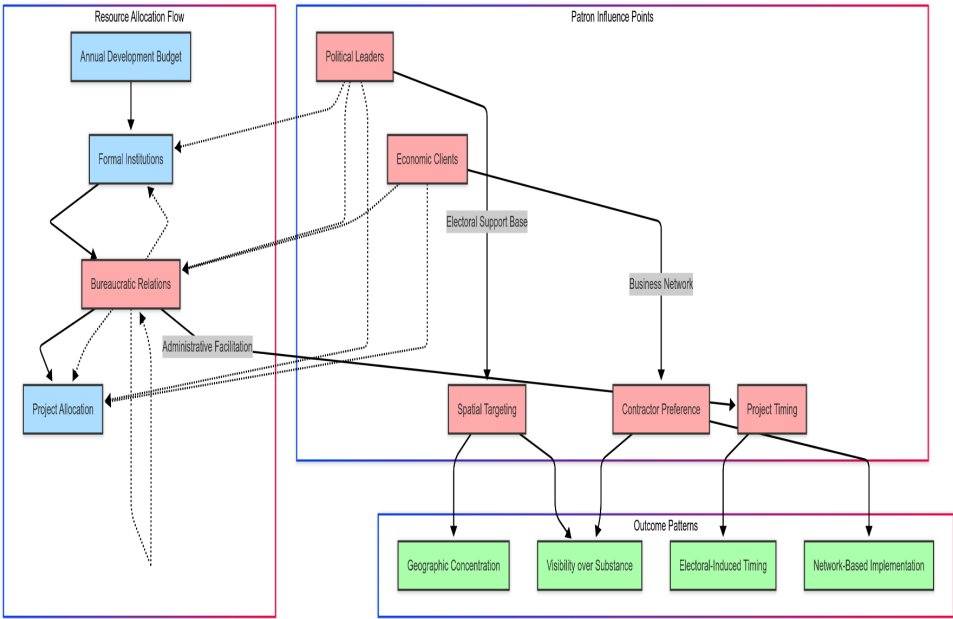


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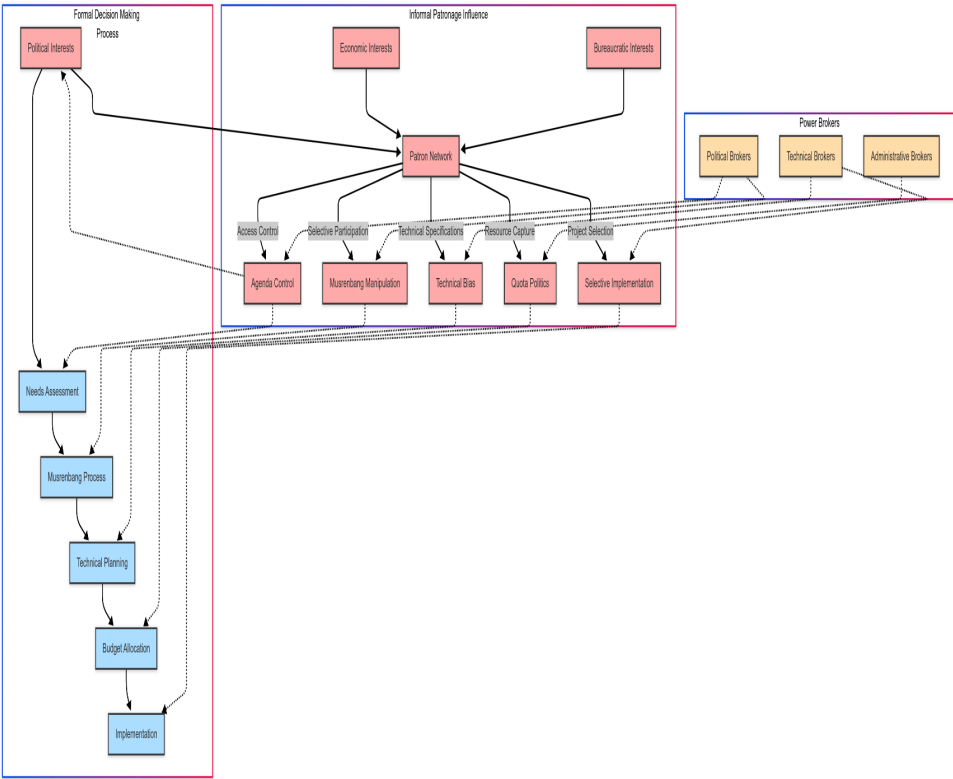
#### Appendix 1



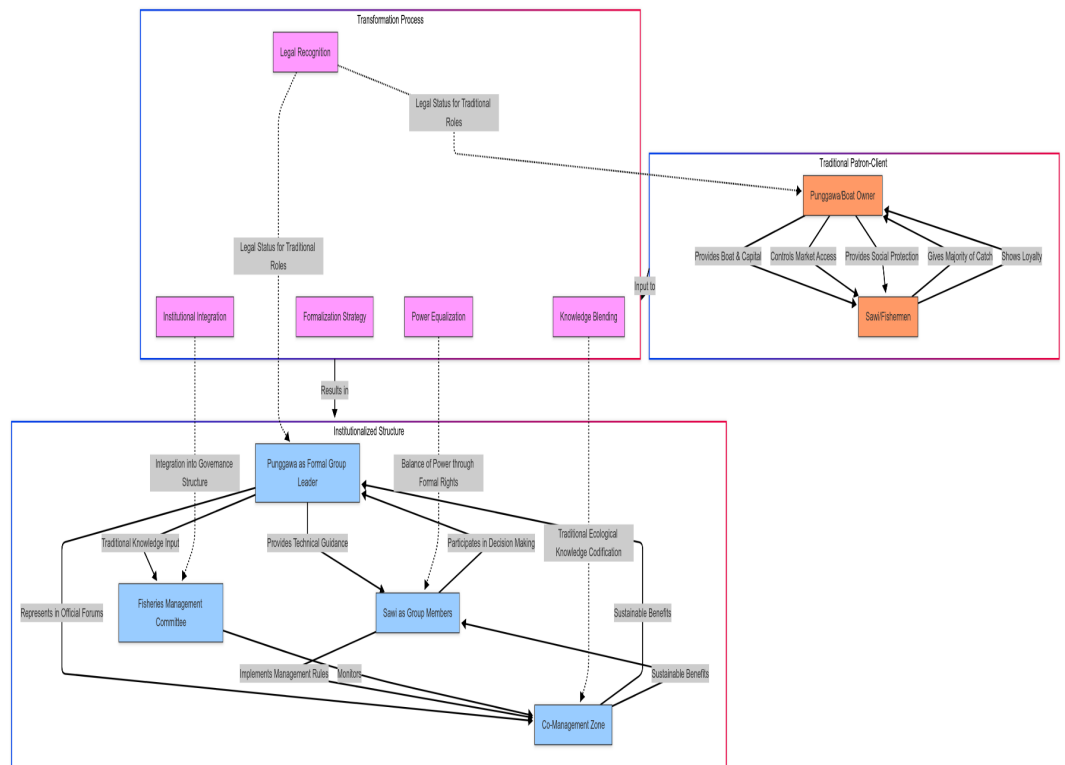
#### Appendix 2



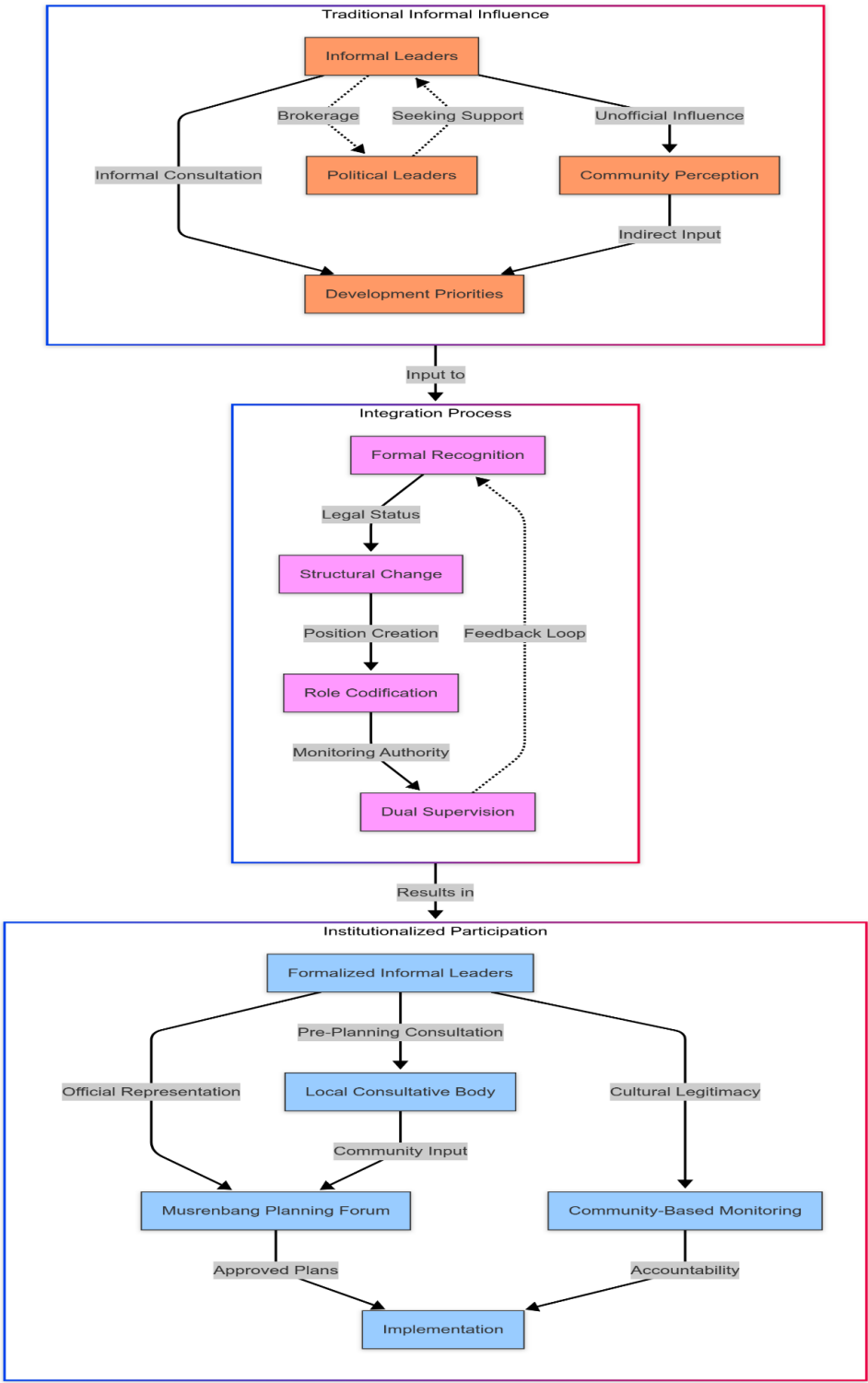
Appendix 3



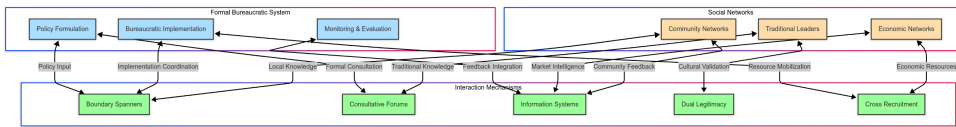
Appendix 4



## Appendix 5



Appendix 6



Appendix 7

