

Reframing Coastal Reclamation Policy: Socio-Ecological Implications of the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Model in the Surabaya Waterfront Land Project

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Received October 13, 2025; Revised December 9, 2025; Accepted December 22, 2025

Cite This Paper in the Following Citation Styles

(a): [1] Mas Roro Lilik Ekowanti, Sri Wahyuni, M. Husni Tamrin, "Reframing Coastal Reclamation Policy: Socio-Ecological Implications of the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Model in the Surabaya Waterfront Land Project," *Environment and Ecology Research*, Vol. 13, No. 6, pp. 907 - 914, 2025. DOI: 10.13189/eer.2025.130612.

(b): Mas Roro Lilik Ekowanti, Sri Wahyuni, M. Husni Tamrin (2025). *Reframing Coastal Reclamation Policy: Socio-Ecological Implications of the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Model in the Surabaya Waterfront Land Project*. *Environment and Ecology Research*, 13(6), 907 - 914. DOI: 10.13189/eer.2025.130612.

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Abstract Coastal reclamation has emerged as a recurring urban strategy across the Global South, reshaping marine ecosystems and coastal livelihoods under the banner of development. This study examines the governance of the Surabaya Waterfront Land (SWL) project in Indonesia through the analytical lens of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) and socio-ecological sustainability. Using a qualitative case study based on in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, the research explores how institutional design and power relations shape ecological outcomes and community well-being. The findings reveal that, despite the formal PPP framework, governance practice remains dominated by private developers, with environmental assessment and community consultation largely symbolic. Weak accountability mechanisms have resulted in the marginalization of local fishing communities and the degradation of mangrove ecosystems. The study reframes PPP not merely as a financial or administrative tool, but as a contested political-ecological process that mediates access to coastal commons. It concludes by emphasizing the need for stronger environmental safeguards, transparent multi-stakeholder oversight, and inclusive participation to ensure that coastal reclamation projects contribute to social justice and ecological resilience.

Keywords Coastal Policy, Socio-Ecological Governance, Public-Private Partnership, Reclamation, Surabaya Waterfront Land

1. Introduction

Coastal reclamation has become a prominent urban development strategy across major cities in the Global South, particularly in Southeast Asia [1]. Proponents present reclamation as a means to expand urban land supply, attract investment, and catalyze maritime-oriented growth, often linked to visions of modern and globally competitive waterfronts [2]. A growing body of scholarship, however, shows that reclamation is also a site of governance contestation that produces spatial conflicts, environmental degradation, and uneven access to land and livelihoods [3], [4]. Experiences from Manila, Jakarta, and Bangkok demonstrate how promises of modernization and resilience can coexist with exclusivity, opacity, and the marginalization of vulnerable coastal communities, especially small-scale fishers and indigenous groups [3], [5], [6], [7], [8].

Within this landscape, Public-Private Partnership has been widely adopted to finance and deliver large urban projects. The model is commonly justified on the grounds of fiscal efficiency, risk sharing, and managerial innovation, offering governments a route to implement capital-intensive initiatives without overburdening public budgets [9], [10], [11]. Evidence from socially and ecologically sensitive projects, however, indicates that such arrangements can entrench power asymmetries in decision making, dilute accountability, and narrow the scope for meaningful public participation when contractual logics and investor imperatives dominate [12], [13]. These tensions are acute in coastal reclamation, where the redistribution of space and risk intersects with environmental externalities and the livelihoods of place-based communities.

The state of the art in Public-Private Partnership scholarship remains anchored in contractual and economic lenses that emphasize efficiency, value for money, financing structures, and risk allocation [14], [15]. While foundational, this emphasis underspecifies the socio-political dynamics that shape how Public-Private Partnerships function in practice. These dynamics include the circulation of power among actors, the institutional conditions for transparency and accountability, and the depth and quality of public participation [16], [17], [18]. They are central to coastal governance, where distributive outcomes and legitimacy depend on the politics of inclusion and knowledge [19]. In short, there is a theoretical gap between what Public-Private Partnership frameworks promise and how governance unfolds when projects reorder urban coastal space.

An empirical gap is also evident in Indonesia. Existing studies of Public-Private Partnerships predominantly examine toll roads, power generation, and transport infrastructure [20], [21], [22], with limited attention to coastal reclamation despite its growing prevalence and institutional complexity. This gap matters because reclamation projects reconfigure land water interfaces and common pool resources, which implicates a broader set of actors and claims than conventional transport projects. These projects therefore offer a critical vantage point from which to study how Public-Private Partnerships logic interact with environmental regulation, spatial justice, and community rights.

This article addresses these gaps by evaluating the Surabaya Waterfront Land project, one of Indonesia's largest reclamation initiatives. Promoted as an integrated coastal development zone for industry, trade, maritime activities, and education, Surabaya Waterfront Land is formally organized through a Public-Private Partnership arrangement that involves municipal authorities, private developers, and stakeholders from civil society and academia. The case is analytically salient because it links a contemporary Asian waterfront agenda to the institutional realities of Public-Private Partnership governance in a socially and ecologically sensitive setting. It enables a

grounded assessment of how contractual logics translate into actor roles and power distribution, and how these dynamics shape the depth of public participation.

Conceptually, the article advances a reframing of Public-Private Partnership in coastal reclamation. It moves from viewing Public-Private Partnership as a predominantly contractual and economic instrument to seeing it as a contested political process embedded in power relations. The guiding conceptual chain is as follows. Public-Private Partnership governance, interpreted mainly through efficiency and contract performance, tends to generate governance asymmetry, notably the dominance of private developers in agenda setting and design choices. This condition yields pseudo-participation or symbolic inclusion of communities in consultative stages with little influence over substantive decisions, which motivates a reframing of Public-Private Partnership toward arrangements that institutionalize inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability. Rather than dismissing Public-Private Partnership outright, the reframing foregrounds design principles and checks that can align private capacity with public purpose in coastal cities.

In many developing-country cities, coastal reclamation has been promoted as a fast and visually compelling route to urban modernization, real-estate expansion, and maritime-oriented growth. Governments facing fiscal constraints and administrative capacity gaps often turn to PPP arrangements to mobilize private finance and technical expertise for such capital-intensive projects. Yet, when environmental regulation, spatial planning, and community rights are weakly institutionalized, the combination of reclamation and PPP can generate socio-ecological trade-offs that are difficult to reverse. The Surabaya Waterfront Land project exemplifies these dynamics in Indonesia: a large-scale, PPP-based reclamation initiative that seeks to reposition the city's waterfront while reconfiguring coastal ecosystems and the livelihoods of small-scale fishers. By placing SWL within regional trends in urban coastal development, the article speaks to wider governance challenges in Southeast Asian and Global South waterfronts.

Against this backdrop, the article aims to evaluate how the PPP-based coastal reclamation of SWL reconfigures governance arrangements, participation, and socio-ecological safeguards. Specifically, it asks: (1) how are roles and responsibilities distributed among private developers, public authorities, and affected communities; and (2) through what mechanisms do these arrangements shape the depth of participation and the protection of socio-ecological interests? By answering these questions, the study contributes to broader debates on the design of PPPs in environmentally sensitive urban coasts

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative case study to examine the

governance of the Surabaya Waterfront Land project within a Public-Private Partnership framework. A case study enables context-rich analysis of actor dynamics, policy processes, and institutional arrangements in a complex coastal reclamation setting, consistent with guidance on qualitative case research [23], [24]. The case was selected because Surabaya Waterfront Land is a large and formally designated Public-Private Partnership that involves municipal authorities, private developers, and coastal communities, providing analytic leverage to observe how contractual logics travel into decision making, accountability, and participation in an environmentally sensitive urban coast.

Data were generated through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and field observation [25], [26]. Interviews with key informants from local government, private developers, community representatives, civil society organizations, and academic observers were conducted using purposive and snowball strategies; conversations were audio recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Document analysis covered memoranda of understanding, environmental impact assessments, spatial and development plans, permits, municipal regulations, official releases, and media reports, while field observations at coastal sites and public consultation events captured practices of participation and day-to-day coordination. A qualitative case study is particularly suited to unpacking how formal PPP arrangements translate into everyday governance practices, because it allows the researcher to trace decisions, negotiations, and contestations across different arenas rather than relying solely on contractual documents or financial indicators.

Analysis followed an iterative thematic strategy that began with close reading of interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and policy documents to identify recurring patterns related to governance, participation, and socio-ecological impacts. An initial set of codes was developed deductively from the literature on PPPs, coastal reclamation, and participatory governance, and was then refined inductively as new themes emerged from the data. Segments of text were coded and re-coded in multiple rounds, and thematic maps were used to connect actor roles, procedural sequences, and perceived impacts. This qualitative, mechanism-oriented approach is appropriate for unpacking how formal PPP arrangements translate into everyday governance practices, because it allows the researcher to trace decisions, negotiations, and contestations across different arenas rather than relying solely on contractual documents or financial indicators. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents increased the credibility of the findings, while peer debriefing and careful documentation of analytical steps enhanced transparency and reproducibility, in line with Braun and Clarke and with Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [27]. Credibility and dependability were strengthened through triangulation across interviews,

documents, and observations, selective member checking, peer debriefing, and maintenance of an audit trail; transferability was pursued through thick description, and research ethics were secured through informed consent, anonymization, secure storage, and a non-interventionist stance during observation [28], [29]. The design faces limitations related to partial access to contractual records and the political sensitivity of ongoing negotiations, which were mitigated by cross-checking claims across sources and by making inferential steps explicit.

In-depth interviews with government officials, private developers, community representatives, civil-society actors, and academic observers were used to reconstruct how different stakeholders perceive the PPP arrangement, environmental safeguards, and participation mechanisms. Field observations at coastal sites and during public consultation events captured interactional dynamics and the situated experiences of small-scale fishers and other marginalized groups. Document analysis of environmental impact assessments, permits, spatial plans, and media coverage provided a longitudinal view of policy commitments and public controversy. Triangulating these three sources enhanced the credibility of the findings by allowing us to check the consistency of claims across actors and materials. Ethical considerations were central, given the political sensitivity of ongoing negotiations and the vulnerability of coastal communities. All participants were informed about the aims of the research, gave verbal or written consent, and were anonymized in transcripts and reporting. Interviews were conducted in settings chosen by participants, and the researcher adopted a non-interventionist stance during observations to avoid exacerbating local tensions.

3. Result and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the main findings of the case study. The analysis is organized into four interrelated themes: PPP governance and private dominance, pseudo-participation and symbolic inclusion, socio-ecological externalities, and the integration of these dynamics into a broader mechanism that links contractual design to socio-ecological outcomes.

The analysis shows three consistent patterns in the Surabaya Waterfront Land project. First, Public-Private Partnership governance is marked by private developer's dominance in agenda setting and design choices, while the municipal government performs largely administrative functions. Second, public participation is procedural and symbolic rather than deliberative, with limited influence from affected communities on substantive decisions. Third, accountability and transparency mechanisms are thin, reflected in weak disclosure practices and the absence of shared oversight structures. Together these patterns illustrate a chain through which contractual PPP logics translate into governance asymmetry and pseudo-

participation, thereby motivating a reframing of PPP toward more inclusive and accountable coastal governance.

1. *PPP governance and private dominance*

Formally, the SWL project is governed by a PPP agreement that specifies the concession period, cost-recovery mechanisms, and broad environmental obligations. However, the institutional design of this framework places strategic steering capacity largely in the hands of the developer consortium. Environmental impact assessments are commissioned and managed by the private partner, with government agencies acting mainly as approvers rather than co-producers of knowledge. Public consultation requirements are fulfilled through one-off socialization meetings rather than deliberative forums. This design reinforces power asymmetries: developers control the timing and content of key studies, while affected communities and line agencies have few opportunities to contest assumptions or demand modifications. As a result, environmental assessments tend to be more symbolic than substantive, signalling compliance without embedding strong safeguards or adaptive monitoring into the PPP contract.

Field evidence indicates that the partnership embodies an imbalance of roles rather than a balanced allocation of authority and risk. Although the project is formally organized as a Public-Private Partnership, decision-making authority over strategic direction and spatial design resides primarily with the developer consortium. The municipal government facilitates permitting and interagency coordination but rarely steers core development choices. This departs from the normative PPP model that emphasizes role symmetry, fair risk distribution, and clearly allocated accountability responsibilities [30], [31], [32].

The dynamic aligns with what Miraftab describes as governance by contract, where formal legal agreements do not secure balanced power unless accompanied by robust joint oversight and public control instruments [33]. In the Surabaya Waterfront Land case, there is no joint steering committee and no independent evaluation body at arm's length from both the government and the developer. The absence of these structures generates an authority vacuum that allows private actors to frame problems and solutions, consolidate technical narratives, and sequence approvals in ways that privilege project momentum over public deliberation. This is consistent with findings from developing country PPPs, where public agencies struggle to maintain strategic control once capital and design expertise are concentrated with the private partner [34].

Comparative Indonesian evidence reinforces the pattern. Research on the Jakarta Bay reclamation reported dominant private influence over coastal planning and a passive role for local government, with the PPP form providing financial and procedural capacity while weakening public direction over distributive outcomes [35]. From a policy network perspective, such dominance by a

single actor within the network undermines collaborative effectiveness and narrows the range of policy alternatives that reach decision venues [36], [37]. In short, the partnership label alone does not guarantee co-steering. Without shared oversight, the PPP form can reproduce private primacy in a sector where social and ecological stakes are high.

2. *Pseudo-participation and symbolic inclusion*

Community participation is present in form yet limited in substance. The dominant mode is information sharing and socialization events rather than co-design or joint decision forums. Affected groups, including small-scale fishers and coastal women, are invited to meetings and briefings but have little leverage to shape the timing, content, or conditions of decisions. In Arnstein's classic terms, practice sits on the rungs of informing and consultation, not on partnership or delegated power [38]. The resulting experience for communities is one of being heard without influence.

This finding mirrors international critiques of nominally inclusive urban environmental projects that adopt the language of participation while sidelining local knowledge and distributive claims, especially in Global South cities where land and livelihood pressures are acute [39], [40], [41]. The Surabaya case shows no institutionalized representation of community delegates within decision venues that matter for design, phasing, and mitigation. Without such representation, there is no arena for the kind of problem-solving that collaborative governance theory envisions, which requires shared forums, transparency of information, and rules that structure fair influence among actors with unequal resources [42], [43].

Information access barriers magnify the problem. Public-facing documents are limited, complaint channels are unclear, and there is no routine feedback on how public input is incorporated. Fung's concept of pseudo-participation captures this well, where communication flows outward from project managers to citizens but does not cycle back to alter choices, which reduces legitimacy and can seed future resistance [44]. Indonesian coastal cases have documented the risks of shallow participation, including horizontal conflict and erosion of social cohesion when perceptions of exclusion accumulate over time (Cahyono & Indriasari, 2021). In Surabaya, exclusionary effects are likely to be unevenly distributed, with groups that rely on near shore commons bearing higher adjustment costs. From the vantage point of urban political ecology, the project channels environmental benefits and burdens through existing social relations, which can widen inequalities when voice and bargaining power are unequal [45].

3. *Accountability and transparency deficits*

The partnership's accountability architecture is thin relative to the project's social and ecological stakes. Key instruments that typically anchor shared accountability in

complex PPPs are either absent or weak. These include a joint steering committee with clear decision rules, an independent monitoring and evaluation unit with the mandate to audit compliance and value for money, and routine disclosure of contracts and performance indicators. In the absence of these instruments, there is no structured venue for contestation of evidence, no independent verification of impact claims, and no credible escalation pathway when promised mitigation or community benefits lag. The net result is a divergence between the ideals of transparency and public control in PPP guidance and actual practice on the ground.

The weakness of accountability structures is closely tied to the earlier two patterns. Private dominance over framing and sequencing reduces the salience of independent scrutiny, while symbolic participation removes social incentives to disclose granular information and to respond publicly to community concerns. In practice, this means that procurement rationales, risk allocation matrices, and environmental commitments are not readily accessible for public interpretation. For coastal reclamation, where externalities are spatially diffuse and long-term, the combination of thin disclosure and limited third-party oversight undermines both social legitimacy and environmental prudence. The literature on PPP accountability has long emphasized that information disclosure and independent review are preconditions for performance claims to be credible, particularly in sectors with complex risk transfers and distributional impacts [46].

These gaps are not solely technical. They arise from institutional choices about where authority sits, who monitors, and what counts as evidence. Addressing them requires more than better reports. It requires anchoring oversight in bodies that are insulated from short-term political and commercial incentives and that include public interest perspectives. It also requires routine public-facing dashboards that disclose design changes, timelines, and community benefit delivery, alongside grievance mechanisms with response standards that communities can use without fear of retaliation.

4. *Integrating the chain and implications*

Taken together, the three themes specify a coherent mechanism. When PPP governance is interpreted primarily through an efficiency and contract performance lens, authority over problem framing and design coalesces with the private partner [47]. That governance asymmetry in turn shapes participation practice by constraining community influence to events of socialization and consultation rather than shared decision-making venues [48]. Weak accountability follows from both conditions, since neither shared oversight nor public disclosure is structurally required or politically incentivized. This chain from PPP governance to governance asymmetry to pseudo-participation explains why coastal reclamation PPPs can drift away from balanced partnership ideals, even when

formal documents refer to collaboration and community engagement.

Theoretically, the Surabaya case strengthens arguments for treating PPP in coastal reclamation as a contested political process rather than a neutral instrument of value for money. It clarifies how contractual logics interact with network power to privilege developer agendas and how participation is rendered symbolic when representation is not built into decision venues. In doing so, the case contributes to the convergence of PPP governance and coastal governance literatures by making explicit the mechanism that links efficiency claims to distributional outcomes and legitimacy.

Practically, the findings suggest a set of design principles that can make PPPs in coastal cities more inclusive and accountable without sacrificing private capacity. First, shared oversight should be institutionalized through a joint steering committee with clear decision rules, publication of minutes, and public reporting of key choices. Second, independent monitoring and evaluation should be embedded with a mandate to audit environmental and social commitments and to publish periodic compliance reports. Third, participation should move from consultation to shared influence by reserving seats for community representatives in decision venues, by providing technical assistance to community delegates to interpret plans and impact assessments, and by establishing grievance channels with response standards and remedy options. These measures do not guarantee consensus, but they increase the probability that coastal reclamation proceeds with clearer information, fairer representation, and stronger checks on the exercise of concentrated power.

The Surabaya experience suggests several reform directions for coastal PPPs. First, multi-stakeholder oversight should be institutionalized through a joint steering committee that includes municipal agencies, developer representatives, and delegates from affected communities and civil society. Such a body should have authority over key design choices, mitigation plans, and monitoring priorities, and its minutes should be made public. Second, environmental safeguards need to be embedded contractually, with independent reviewers mandated to audit impact assessments, verify baseline data, and track compliance over time. Third, participation must move beyond informational meetings toward shared influence, for example, by granting community delegates veto or renegotiation rights over specific aspects that directly affect their livelihoods. Finally, transparency should be operationalized through routine disclosure of contracts, environmental reports, and performance indicators in accessible formats. Together, these reforms would not eliminate conflict, but they would rebalance the PPP model toward socio-ecological accountability and strengthen the legitimacy of coastal reclamation in Indonesia and comparable contexts.

4. Conclusions

This article set out to evaluate Public-Private Partnership governance in the Surabaya Waterfront Land coastal reclamation through a qualitative case study design, and the evidence converges on three interrelated findings. Private developers exert agenda setting power and shape key design choices while municipal actors essentially perform administrative and facilitative tasks. Community participation is primarily procedural and symbolic, offering voice without meaningful influence over substantive decisions. Accountability and transparency are thin, as shown by the absence of shared oversight bodies, limited disclosure, and weak public review of performance and impacts. Together these findings show how a contractual and efficiency-oriented understanding of a Public-Private Partnership can drift from balanced partnership ideals when applied in an environmentally sensitive urban coast.

The theoretical contribution lies in clarifying a mechanism that links contractual logics to distributional and legitimacy outcomes in coastal cities. The Surabaya case specifies a conceptual chain in which Public-Private Partnership governance generates governance asymmetry through the concentration of steering capacity with private actors, which in turn produces pseudo-participation in which communities are heard but do not shape outcomes. Recognizing this sequence motivates a reframing of Public-Private Partnership as a contested political process rather than a neutral instrument. The study thus connects literatures on partnership governance and coastal governance by showing how efficiency claims and risk allocation talk interact with network power and institutional design to structure who decides, whose knowledge counts, and how costs and benefits are distributed.

Translating these insights into practice points to concrete design principles for coastal Public-Private Partnership. Shared oversight should be institutionalized through a joint steering committee with clear decision rules and published minutes so that agenda setting and trade-offs are visible and contestable. Independent monitoring and evaluation should be embedded with a mandate to audit environmental and social commitments and to issue regular public reports that include compliance metrics and remedial actions. Routine disclosure should be provided through accessible dashboards that track design changes, timelines, mitigation delivery, and community benefit programs in language that non-specialists can understand. Representation should move beyond consultation by reserving seats for community delegates in decision-making venues, supported by technical assistance that allows those delegates to interpret plans, contracts, and impact assessments. Grievance channels should include defined response standards, transparent resolution timelines, and escalation pathways that protect users from retaliation. These measures do not eliminate conflict, but they align private capacity with public purpose by strengthening

information, representation, and checks on concentrated authority.

The analysis faces limitations that arise from partial access to contractual documents and from the political sensitivity of an ongoing project, which constrain the ability to observe certain negotiations and verify some claims beyond public sources. Future research should extend the design comparatively across Southeast Asian waterfronts to test the scope conditions under which the identified mechanism holds, and longitudinally to examine whether governance reforms shift power relations and participation depth over time. In closing, Surabaya Waterfront Land functions as a cautionary and constructive reference for cities that seek to harness private finance and expertise in coastal development while safeguarding social justice and environmental integrity. The case shows why reframing Public-Private Partnership toward inclusive, transparent, and accountable arrangements matters now, and how it can be done in ways that are realistic within the institutional constraints of the Global South.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express sincere gratitude to Universitas Hang Tuah, Surabaya, Indonesia, for providing research funding and institutional support that made this study possible.

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