



Analysis of the Social Meaning of Law in Land Dispute Resolution Decisions At the State Administrative Court

(Sociological Study of Law on Legal Decision at the Surabaya State Administrative Court No.
33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY Concerning Land Ownership Disputes)

Sri Sudarti, Bonaventura Ngarawula, Tommy Hariyanto

University of Merdeka Malang,
Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the socio-legal meaning of the decisions of the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN), focusing on the social construction of law and the interpretation of the decisions by legal actors and the public. Furthermore, this study analyzes the social, cultural, political, and legal factors that influence judges' considerations in deciding land dispute case No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY. The approach used is qualitative-descriptive, using legal discourse analysis and social interpretation methods. Data were obtained through a study of decision documents, in-depth interviews with judges, plaintiffs, advocates, and related parties, and observations of the trial process. The analysis was conducted thematically, integrating four main theories: social justice theory (John Rawls, Amartya Sen, Nancy Fraser), legal pluralism theory (Sally Engle Merry, John Griffiths), symbolic interaction theory (Herbert Blumer), and structuration theory (Anthony Giddens). The results indicate that the socio-legal construction in the Surabaya PTUN decisions reflects an integration of positive law and human values. Judges not only uphold legal certainty but also deliver substantive justice by considering public morality and social welfare. Meanwhile, the interpretation of decisions by legal actors and society demonstrates that justice is not solely determined by legal texts, but also by social experiences, symbolic communication, and the sense of humanity felt during the judicial process. The interaction process in the courtroom is a crucial arena in establishing the social legitimacy of the law, where the feeling of being heard and treated fairly becomes a moral symbol of living law. From the perspective of social, cultural, political, and legal factors, it was found that social inequality between citizens and the government remains a major challenge in accessing administrative justice. Nevertheless, judges act as moral agents and power mediators, balancing rigid legal structures with dynamic social needs through reflective discretion. In the context of value pluralism, judges navigate the conflict between modern, legalistic law and local values oriented toward social harmony, mutual cooperation, and respect for human dignity. The conclusion of this study confirms that substantive justice and the social legitimacy of the law can only be achieved if positive law is operationalized through the conscience of judges who are sensitive to humanitarian values and the social context of society. Just law is living law that is, law that does not stop at text, but continues to transform through moral, social, and interactional practices within society. Thus, in this case, the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) serves as a concrete example of how the rule of law can be combined with a sense of justice, producing law that is not only normatively valid but also socially and morally meaningful.

Keywords: Substantive Justice, Legal Pluralism, Social Meaning of Law, Judge's Consideration, Surabaya Administrative Court.

1. INTRODUCTION

Land disputes are complex issues and often involve various legal and social aspects.(Gillespie & Fu, 2014; Muhammad Nisar et al., 2022)The process of resolving land disputes in court not only serves to provide legal certainty, but must also take into account the social meaning of law that exists in society.(Gillespie, 2014)Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the social meaning of law is essential for achieving true justice and ensuring that the judicial process provides optimal benefits for all parties involved.

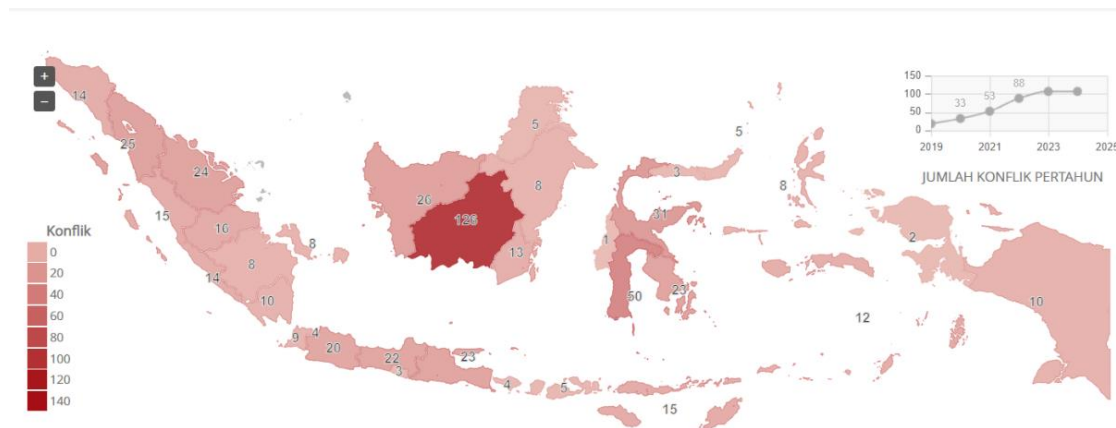
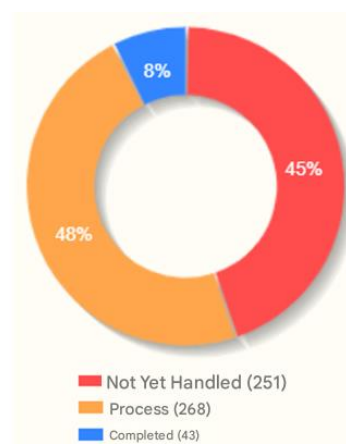


Figure 1. Distribution of Land Conflicts in Indonesia

Source: accessed via <https://tanahkita.id/>

The process of resolving land disputes in court not only serves to provide legal certainty, but must also pay attention to the social meaning of law that exists in society (Gillespie, 2011). A comprehensive understanding of the social meaning of law is important to achieve true justice and ensure that the judicial process can provide optimal benefits for all parties involved (Iswantoro, 2021). Land disputes are complex issues and often involve various legal and social aspects (Ahyani, 2018; Gillespie, 2011; Gillespie & Fu, 2014; Iswantoro, 2021). This study aims to fill the knowledge gap in this area and provide recommendations that can help improve the effectiveness and fairness of the land dispute resolution process in court.



Picture 2. Graph of Land Conflict Management in Indonesia in 2024

Source: accessed via <https://tanahkita.id/>

Empirical problems in land disputes in Indonesia include various real cases that often occur in the field (Brand-Ballard, 2010; Iswantoro, 2021). For example, conflicts between residents and plantation or mining companies often surface. Many residents claim that their land has been unilaterally taken over by large companies without any fair compensation (Brand-Ballard, 2010; YC et al., 2004). Cases like these demonstrate the crucial role of the courts in resolving land disputes and providing legal certainty. However, in reality, protracted legal processes and high costs often prevent citizens from effectively pursuing their rights. As a result, many cases result in dissatisfaction and prolonged conflict.

As another example, the land dispute in Mesuji, Lampung, is a prominent case. This dispute involved local residents and a palm oil plantation company, where unclear land boundaries and ownership rights existed. This

conflict escalated into violence and resulted in loss of life, demonstrating the crucial role of the courts in providing just and timely solutions. Unfortunately, in many cases, the judicial process is slow and unresponsive to social dynamics on the ground, exacerbating tensions between the disputing parties.

From a theoretical perspective, the problems in resolving land disputes include the limitations of existing legal concepts in dealing with the complexity of land dispute cases (von Benda-Beckmann & von Benda-Beckmann, 2004). Positive law is often considered incapable of covering all aspects related to land disputes, including social and cultural aspects (Erni, 2018; YC et al., 2004). Critical legal theory highlights that laws often reflect the interests of the more powerful, and are less sensitive to the needs of marginalized communities. In the context of land disputes, this means that laws may favor large corporations over local residents (Erni, 2018; Gillespie, 2014; Gillespie & Fu, 2014; YC et al., 2004).

From the perspective of legal sociology, law is not merely a set of norms written in statutory regulations, but also a living social product that interacts with the values, structures, and dynamics of society. Law is understood as a social construct that reflects relations of power, interests, and public morality within the context of communal life. Within this framework, the meaning of law is found not only in statutory texts or judicial decisions, but also in how society interprets, perceives, and practices law in its social reality. Therefore, legal sociology positions law as a social institution with empirical and moral dimensions, where legal legitimacy depends on the extent to which the law aligns with societal values and needs.

One of the most obvious areas demonstrating the interaction between law and society is the dispute resolution process in the State Administrative Court (PTUN). As an administrative judicial institution, the PTUN plays a crucial role in monitoring government actions to ensure they do not conflict with the principles of justice and fairness. However, in practice, state administrative disputes involve not only formal legal aspects but also social, political, and cultural dimensions. Land disputes, for example, demonstrate how state law must confront local values, communal rights, and societal perceptions of justice that do not always align with the logic of modern administrative law. This is where a sociological analysis of law becomes relevant in understanding how law operates not only as a norm but also as a social meaning negotiated among legal actors and society.

This study, entitled “Analysis of the Social Meaning of Law in the Land Dispute Resolution Process at the State Administrative Court (Legal Sociology Study of Legal Decisions at the Surabaya PTUN No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY)”, seeks to uncover the social construction of law in the Surabaya PTUN decision and the social, cultural, political, and legal factors that influence judges’ considerations in deciding cases. Through a legal sociology approach, this study views law as an arena of social interaction, where the values of justice, public morality, and administrative interests meet and negotiate. Thus, this study not only assesses law from the perspective of its legality, but also from how the law is interpreted, accepted, and implemented by society as a reflection of substantive justice that exists in social reality.

Furthermore, the theory of legal pluralism shows that in Indonesia's diverse society, there are various legal systems in force, such as customary law and state law (Erni, 2018; Tegnan, 2015; YC et al., 2004). Customary law often has dispute resolution mechanisms that are more acceptable to local communities. (YC et al., 2004) However, in many cases, state law tends to override customary law, causing tension and dissatisfaction. For example, court decisions based solely on formal law without considering local customary norms may be considered unfair by communities that still adhere to their traditions (Joeni, Arianto, 2014; Nurjaya, 2016; Prasojo, 2015; Tegnan, 2015).

Normatively, the problem in resolving land disputes is related to the gap between ideal legal regulations and actual practice. Ideally, law should provide legal certainty, justice, and protection of human rights (Tegnan, 2015). However, in practice, many obstacles are encountered. One major obstacle is corruption in the judiciary, which can affect the independence and objectivity of judges. Furthermore, political and economic pressure from interested parties can also hinder a fair trial.

In many cases, existing legal norms fail to fully protect the rights of indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups. For example, the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law (UUPA), which aims to guarantee legal certainty over land, is often ignored or misused in practice. Many indigenous people have lost their land due to overlapping land certificates issued by the government to large corporations. This demonstrates the gap between ideal legal norms and their implementation on the ground.

The analysis of the socio-legal meaning of the land dispute resolution process in court is a study that encompasses various legal and social aspects that interact in the context of land dispute resolution. This research includes an understanding of how socio-legal principles influence the way courts work in resolving land disputes, as well as how this understanding influences the outcome of those dispute resolutions. In this context, socio-legal refers to legal principles oriented towards social and cultural values, as well as social justice. Socio-legal encompasses concepts such as justice, equality, and the public interest, all of which are important in the land dispute resolution process.

Land dispute resolution in court often involves multiple parties, including landowners, plaintiffs, and other parties involved in the dispute. This process requires a thorough understanding of land law and how socio-legal principles can be applied in this context. This analysis includes a study of justice-based land dispute resolution systems, which seek to find fair and effective solutions to land disputes. This includes understanding how land administration systems, land ownership distribution, and land ownership legality influence the frequency of land disputes.

This research also covers justice-based land dispute resolution strategies, including state administrative strategies, court strategies, and legislative strategies. This research emphasizes the importance of establishing a special court to resolve land disputes, with the aim of increasing justice and effectiveness in resolving these disputes. Thus, overall, the analysis of the socio-legal meaning of the land dispute resolution process in court includes a deep understanding of how socio-legal principles influence the way courts work in resolving land disputes, as well as how this understanding influences the outcome of the dispute resolution. Based on the description of the problem above, the socio-legal approach in this research is important to understand the socio-legal meaning of law in the context of land dispute resolution. This approach combines legal analysis with a social perspective, allowing researchers to understand how law is practiced and perceived by society. For example, by understanding society's perceptions of justice and legal legitimacy, we can identify factors that influence the acceptance of court decisions by disputing parties.

Thus, this study highlights the relationship between law as a formal state institution and the social impacts resulting from its application in the context of land disputes, specifically in the decision of the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY. The focus of the research is not only on the legalistic aspects of the administrative decisions of state administrative officials, but also on the social dynamics surrounding conflicts over land ownership and control. Within the framework of the sociology of law, this study seeks to uncover how the social meaning of law is formed, negotiated, and implemented through interactions between various actors such as judges, lawyers, public officials, and the community—and how court decisions reflect and influence social norms, values, and practices that exist in society.

The main issue examined is how law functions not only as a written, coercive rule, but also as a social instrument containing values, norms, and power that influence interactions between individuals and groups in land disputes. The PTUN, as an administrative justice institution, is often perceived as a rigid and legalistic arena. However, behind its procedural formality, the resulting decisions are often fraught with social and political meaning, reflecting the interaction between state law and social realities on the ground. In the context of land ownership disputes, formal law often clashes with community perceptions of justice, social rights, and the symbolic meaning of land as a source of life, identity, and social status.

The case that is the focus of this research provides an opportunity to better understand how the State Administrative Court (PTUN) functions as a social mediation institution that handles conflicts between citizen interests and state policy. The land dispute that is the subject of the case is not simply a legal and administrative issue, but rather a complex social event, encompassing the history of land ownership, the economic and social structures of the parties, and the local cultural values inherent in the land. Therefore, the analysis of this case will explore several important questions: How does the PTUN view the social function of land in community life? How are court decisions influenced by the social, economic, and political factors surrounding the case? And how do communities interpret and respond to the judicial process and outcomes?

Furthermore, this study seeks to uncover how the socio-legal meaning of land as a material and symbolic resource is formed and transformed in line with social and legal changes. From the perspective of Ehrlich and other sociological theorists of law, land is seen not only as an economic asset but also as a symbol of social relations, cultural identity, and power. Land disputes in the State Administrative Court (PTUN) often become an arena for a struggle between economic interests and social values, where the law plays a mediating role but also has the potential

to reinforce inequality. Therefore, this study focuses on how administrative law functions as a social mechanism that not only establishes formal rights but also shapes public perceptions of justice and legal legitimacy.

The Surabaya Administrative Court Decision No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY serves as a concrete example of how the judiciary strives to uphold the law amidst the dilemma between administrative legal certainty and social justice. Through this case study, the research will explore the social processes that took place before, during, and after the decision was rendered. This includes the legal strategies employed by lawyers, the position of public officials as defendants, and public reactions to the decision. Thus, this research positions the law not merely as a formal instrument, but as part of a social ecosystem that influences and is influenced by society.

Within its analytical framework, this study examines several key aspects in the social dynamics of land dispute resolution at the PTUN:

1. **Perceptions of Justice.** This study analyzes how disputing parties—both citizens and government agencies—interpret justice in the context of administrative land disputes. Are PTUN decisions considered to reflect substantive justice, or are they merely legal formalities that benefit certain parties? This perception of justice is inseparable from local values and social norms that exist in society, which often serve as a measure for society in accepting or rejecting legal decisions.
2. **The Role of Lawyers and Legal Actors.** In disputes at the State Administrative Court (PTUN), lawyers and legal advisors play a strategic role in shaping the narrative and legal arguments. This study examines how lawyers develop their argumentative strategies, utilize administrative law norms, and interact with judges and defendant officials. It also assesses the extent to which the legal strategies employed are influenced by social, economic, and power relations between the actors.
3. **The Relationship between Law and Power.** This dimension highlights how social and political power structures influence the course of justice. Land disputes involving public officials often open up the possibility of political pressure, bureaucratic intervention, or economic influence. Therefore, it is important to understand how administrative law and political power interact, and how courts maintain their independence in these tense situations.
4. **Social Impact of Court Decisions.** Every PTUN decision, especially those concerning land rights, has broad social consequences. This research explores the social and economic impact of these decisions, for both the winners and losers, including how court decisions alter social relations, status, and economic access in the community. The research also explores whether these decisions actually resolve conflicts or create new tensions in local communities.
5. **Legal Implications for Changing Social Norms.** Land disputes resolved at the State Administrative Court (PTUN) not only impact individuals but also have the potential to shape new social norms. This study analyzes whether the court's decision in this case plays a role in creating new patterns in society's relationship with the state—for example, in terms of ownership, legitimacy, and legal participation—or whether it actually reinforces inequality and social alienation from the formal legal system.

This research uses a qualitative approach with case studies and in-depth interviews with various stakeholders: citizens in dispute, lawyers, officials from relevant agencies, and judges handling the cases. Data analysis was conducted interactively, emphasizing the interpretation of the social meaning of each stage of the legal process at the PTUN. Through this approach, the research not only describes judicial procedures but also interprets how the law is perceived, understood, and lived by the communities involved in the dispute.

Based on the research findings, recommendations for judicial policies and practices will be developed to strengthen the effectiveness and social justice in resolving land disputes. Some of the main recommendations put forward include: (1) Improving access to justice through the provision of legal aid and reducing court costs for low-income communities; (2) Sociological training for judges and lawyers to be more sensitive to the social and cultural context of land disputes; (3) Strengthening alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as administrative mediation and conciliation; (4) Increasing transparency and accountability of the judicial process to prevent conflicts of interest and abuse of power; and (5) Collaborating with indigenous communities and local figures in handling land cases that have a strong cultural dimension.

Thus, the judicial process at the State Administrative Court (PTUN) is expected to produce not only formal legal certainty but also substantive social justice. The complexity of land disputes demands an integrative approach between

legal, social, and cultural aspects. This research seeks to fill the knowledge gap in this field by providing a new understanding of how law functions as a social mechanism in a pluralistic society. The research findings are expected to contribute to a paradigm shift in administrative law in Indonesia, shifting from a mere formal legal instrument to an adaptive, inclusive, and equitable social institution.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Social Law Theory (Eugen Ehrlich, 2017)

Social Legal Theory is an approach that examines law not only as a set of formal rules, but also as a social phenomenon influenced by various societal dynamics, including the values, norms, and powers that apply within it. Social Legal Theory developed by Eugen Ehrlich in his work *Fundamental Principles of the Sociology of Law*, first published by Harvard University Press in 1936 and then published several times until 2017, emphasizes that the core of legal development lies not in formal institutions such as legislation, legal science, or court decisions, but in society itself (Ehrlich, 2017). Ehrlich (2017) states that true law is "living law," namely, social norms that are actually implemented in everyday life. He clearly distinguishes between formal, written law and social law, which is born and developed within social associations. In his view, a legal approach that only emphasizes formal legal norms is considered incapable of fully explaining how law truly functions in society. Therefore, law must be understood as part of the social network in which humans live and interact. Individuals never stand alone, but are always part of social associations such as families, communities, or organizations. This is where social law is formed from customs, norms, and relationship patterns that shape the internal order within these associations. Ehrlich emphasizes the importance of the sociology of law as a means of recognizing and understanding social norms that truly live and function, not just those written in legislation. He also rejects the idea that law can be fully derived through formal deductive logic, because law is essentially the result of social processes, not simply a logical construct (Ehrlich, 2017). Thus, Ehrlich's social legal theory shifts attention from static legal norms to the social dynamics of society which are the main source of the formation of law.

2.2. Theory of Legal Pluralism

The theory of legal pluralism is an important framework for understanding the complex legal realities of multicultural societies, such as Indonesia. This theory highlights the coexistence of various legal systems within a given social space. According to Griffiths (1986), legal pluralism encompasses two main types: weak legal pluralism and strong legal pluralism. Weak legal pluralism refers to a situation in which the existence of alternative legal systems, such as customary law or religious law, depends on the recognition of state law. In contrast, strong legal pluralism describes a situation in which these legal systems operate autonomously without the need to obtain legitimacy from state law.

The theory of legal pluralism states that more than one legal system can apply simultaneously in a society, such as state law, customary law, and religious law. In the diverse Indonesian context, this theory is highly relevant because it can help analyze how various legal systems interact and sometimes clash in resolving land disputes. Legal pluralism will help understand how customary law and formal law can collaborate or compete in the land dispute resolution process.

In general, legal pluralism refers to the fact that different legal systems or rules can function side by side in a single social environment. Classically, legal pluralism is often associated with anthropological studies of customary law in non-Western societies, documented by ethnographers such as Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard. However, further developments include legal pluralism in the context of colonialism, decolonization, and post-colonialism, which demonstrate how different norms can overlap and influence each other (Poo, 2018; Spash, 2009).

According to Sally Falk Moore, the concept of a "semi-autonomous social field" explains that each social field can create rules and enforce compliance, but remains integrated within the broader social structure. This means that even though a particular social field appears autonomous, it is still influenced by external forces that influence its decision-making (Spash, 2009). This concept is relevant to understanding how various legal systems interact with each other, both within local societies and on a broader scale such as global and regional legal systems.

2.3. Social Justice Theory

Social justice theory is a conceptual framework that aims to create a just and equal social order by emphasizing the fair distribution of rights, opportunities, and resources (Alwino, 2017; Soleh, 2018). This theory is rooted in the idea that every individual has an equal right to enjoy the benefits of social and economic progress, and is protected from discrimination or structural injustice (Faiz, 2017). The concept of social justice has developed through various schools of thought, such as John Rawls' "justice as fairness" approach, which emphasizes that inequality is only acceptable if it benefits those least advantaged (Alwino, 2017; Faiz, 2017; Marilang, 2018; Pettit, 1974; Soleh, 2018). In addition, this theory also encompasses non-material dimensions such as the elimination of oppression, marginalization, and exploitation, as introduced by Iris Marion Young. In its application, social justice encompasses the principles of equality, equity (justice tailored to needs), human rights, and active participation in decision-making. This theory not only analyzes existing inequalities but also provides practical guidance for designing policies and actions capable of creating social inclusion and correcting existing structural inequalities. In a legal context, social justice is often used to evaluate whether legal mechanisms reflect substantive justice values that are widely accepted by society.

2.4. Policy Implementation Theory (Edwards III)

The implementation model developed by George C. Edwards III regarding policy implementation illustrates the role of governance within it. It emphasizes four important factors: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure, which interact to produce a set of values within a policy, thus maximizing its contribution to the policy being implemented (Edwards III, 1980; Novrianna et al., 2022; Sadhana, 2011; Wandersman et al., 2008). The policy implementation model developed by George C. Edwards III is one of the most comprehensive theoretical frameworks in the analysis of public policy implementation. This model emphasizes that the success of policy implementation is determined not only by the policy's content itself, but also by the dynamic interaction between four main factors: communication, resources, disposition (the attitude of implementers), and bureaucratic structure. The combination of these four elements forms a value system that influences the effectiveness of policy implementation in the field.

- a) **Communication:** Effective communication is the foundation of successful policy implementation. Edwards III emphasized that policy objectives must be clearly communicated to implementers at all levels of the organization. The information conveyed must be accurate, consistent, and understandable to all parties involved. Ineffective communication, such as unclear or inconsistent messages, can lead to confusion, misinterpretation, or even rejection of the policy. For example, policies involving multiple parties require good coordination so that all actors understand their respective roles.
- b) **Resources:** Resources include the funds, time, personnel, and tools needed to implement a policy. Without adequate resources, even well-designed policies are difficult to implement effectively. Edwards III highlights that resource shortages are often a major obstacle to policy implementation, particularly in developing countries or in organizations with limited capacity. In addition to the quantity of resources, the distribution and management of these resources also influence the outcome of policy implementation.
- c) **Disposition (Implementer Attitude):** The implementer's disposition or attitude toward a policy significantly influences the success of implementation. Implementers who have a positive attitude and support a policy will tend to work hard to ensure its success. Conversely, implementers who disagree or feel excluded from the policy formulation process may show resistance or even sabotage its implementation. Therefore, it is important to involve policy implementers in the planning stage to increase their sense of ownership of the policy.
- d) **Bureaucratic Structure:** Bureaucratic structure encompasses the governance, procedures, and organizational hierarchy involved in policy implementation. A structure that is too rigid or complex can slow down the implementation process, while a flexible structure can facilitate adaptation to challenges on the ground. Edwards III also emphasized the importance of oversight and coordination mechanisms to ensure that policy implementation is in accordance with plans. An efficient bureaucracy can create a work environment conducive to policy implementation.

2.5. Structuration Theory

Structuration theory, put forward by Anthony Giddens, states that social structures and individual actions mutually shape each other (Chatterjee et al., 2019). In the context of land disputes, this theory can help understand how legal structures influence individual actions and, conversely, how individual actions can influence changes in legal structures. This is relevant in analyzing how social and cultural norms influence the application of law in land dispute resolution. Anthony Giddens, born in London in 1938, is one of the most influential social theorists of the modern era. He earned a doctorate from the University of Cambridge and is known for his work linking various disciplines such as sociology, political science, and psychology. One of his greatest contributions to social theory was the development of structuration theory, formally outlined in his books "Central Problems in Social Theory" (1979) and "The Constitution of Society" (1984). Structuration theory, developed by Anthony Giddens, provides an analytical framework for understanding the relationship between social structure and human agency. Amidst the long-standing debate in social theory about how structure influences human action and vice versa, Giddens introduced the concept of structural duality, which states that structure and agency shape each other and function as two sides of the same coin. Structures not only constrain but also enable human action, while human action constantly shapes and reproduces structures.

2.6. Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is a key approach to understanding the social dynamics that occur when groups or individuals have incompatible goals, values, or resources. It highlights how conflict arises, develops, and how it can be managed or resolved. Conflict theory emphasizes that society is composed of groups with different and often conflicting interests, which can lead to conflict. This theory will help understand the dynamics of conflict in land disputes, particularly how the economic and political interests of various groups can influence the process and outcome of land dispute resolution. Conflict theory, largely pioneered by Karl Marx, emphasizes the importance of social inequality as a key factor in creating conflict. Marx believed that social structures, particularly economic injustice, fuel conflict between social classes. In this context, the ruling class uses its means of power to maintain the status quo, while the oppressed class seeks to change these structures to achieve social and economic justice. However, conflict theory is not limited to an economic perspective alone. Max Weber, for example, expanded this approach by adding political and social dimensions. He emphasized that conflict can arise not only from economic injustice but also from unequal distribution of power and status. In Weber's view, conflict often involves opposition between groups striving for political recognition and influence. Modern conflict theory also recognizes the importance of social and cultural identities in triggering conflict. Ethnic, religious, or other identity conflicts are often fueled by feelings of discrimination, marginalization, or inequality felt by minority groups. In the context of globalization, migration, and rapid social change, identity conflicts have become increasingly significant as a source of social tension.

2.7. Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction theory focuses on how individuals and groups in society interact and assign meaning to their actions. In the context of land disputes, this theory can be used to analyze how disputing parties interpret judicial processes and legal decisions, and how their perceptions of justice are shaped through social interaction. Symbolic interaction is an approach in sociology that focuses on the social interactions that occur between individuals and how they construct meaning through these interactions. This theory is based on the idea that humans behave based on the meanings they assign to the things around them, which are defined through social interaction. Symbolic interaction is closely associated with the work of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, who introduced the term in 1937.

George Herbert Mead, a philosopher and social psychologist, is known as one of the main proponents of this theory. According to Mead, the mind, self, and society emerge through the process of social interaction. He argued that individuals become aware of themselves through the process of taking the perspective of others, also known as role-taking. This process allows individuals to understand and respond to the expectations of others in social interactions.

Herbert Blumer, who later developed Mead's ideas, introduced the term "symbolic interaction" in his article Social Psychology in 1937 and continued to develop this theory through various works, including his famous book, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method in 1969. Blumer emphasized that human interaction is not mechanical, but depends heavily on how individuals interpret the actions of others through symbols, such as language and gestures.

2.8. Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory highlights the important role played by the availability and management of resources, both material such as money, land, and physical assets, and non-material such as social support, political networks, and intellectual capacity in the process of social change (Edwards & Gillham, 2013; Golhasani & Hosseinirad, 2017). In the context of land disputes, this theory is relevant for understanding how disputing groups strategize by mobilizing various forms of resources at their disposal. Groups with greater access to resources, such as experienced lawyers, political support, and financial capital, typically have a stronger bargaining position in fighting for their rights through legal channels or negotiations (Abromaviciute et al., 2019; Edelman & Galanter, 2015; Edwards & Gillham, 2013; Golhasani & Hosseinirad, 2017; Sukmana, 2013). In contrast, less empowered groups, such as farmers or indigenous communities, often have to rely on non-material resources, such as community solidarity, advocacy networks, or international support, to balance their power (Golhasani & Hosseinirad, 2017; Sukmana, 2013). This theory also highlights that unequal access to resources influences the outcome of disputes, with wealthier parties with better access to resources tending to obtain more favorable decisions in legal proceedings. Therefore, resource mobilization theory offers an important theoretical framework for understanding power dynamics in social conflicts, including land disputes, and how groups can use their resources to achieve their goals and influence conflict outcomes.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a sociological approach to law through case studies. Qualitative research aims to understand social and legal phenomena occurring in the field by exploring the socio-legal meaning of the land dispute resolution process at the Surabaya District Court. Through this approach, researchers are able to explore various social, economic, and cultural factors that influence the judicial process, as well as how legal decisions influence perceptions of justice in society.

Research Focus

1) The Social and Legal Meaning of the Decision of the Surabaya State Administrative Court

a. Social Construction of Law in PTUN Decisions.

Examining how the social meaning of law is formed through the interaction between formal law and social values in the land dispute resolution process at the State Administrative Court (PTUN). This focus examines how judges, plaintiffs, defendants, and other legal actors construct understandings of justice, legal certainty, and social legitimacy within the administrative justice sphere.

b. Interpretation of Decisions by Legal Actors and Society.

Analyzes how legal actors (judges, lawyers, state administrative officials, and affected communities) interpret court decisions. This aspect highlights how decisions are understood not only as legal decisions but also as symbols of social legitimacy that influence acceptance, resistance, or changes in legal behavior in society.

2) Social, Cultural, Political, and Legal Factors that Influence Judges' Considerations.

a. Social Inequality and Access to Administrative Justice.

Exploring the extent to which differences in social and economic status and access to legal resources influence the positions of the parties in land disputes and the judges' considerations in the trial process at the PTUN.

b. The Conflict between Modern Administrative Law and Local Values.

Examines how local social and cultural values, including customary norms, social institutions, and community perceptions of justice, interact or even conflict with the principles of modern administrative law applied by the courts.

c. Substantive Justice and Social Legitimacy in PTUN Decisions.

Analyzing the extent to which PTUN decisions reflect substantive justice recognized by society, not just formal justice. This focus highlights whether judges' reasoning has taken into account the social and moral dimensions inherent in land disputes, and how this impacts the social legitimacy of law at the local level.

Data analysis in this study was conducted both during the data collection process and after the data collection was completed within a certain period. The technique used to analyze the data was descriptive, more specifically using an interactive model. According to Bogdan in Sugiyono (2012), data analysis is the process of systematically searching

for and organizing data obtained from interviews, field notes, and other materials, so that the data can be easily understood and communicated to others. Data analysis in this study used the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This model emphasizes that data analysis activities are cyclical and interrelated, not linear. The analysis process is not only carried out after the data is collected, but has begun from the beginning of data collection and continues until the researcher reaches a final conclusion. Miles and Huberman stated that there are three main stages in qualitative data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The Social and Legal Meaning of the Decision of the Surabaya State Administrative Court

a. Social Construction of Law in State Administrative Court Decisions

The Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) has a diverse range of disputes, but the majority involve conflicts between citizens and local government agencies, particularly over permits, positions, and land ownership. Land disputes within the Surabaya PTUN reflect the complex relationship between individual interests and state administrative authority. These issues often extend beyond the formal legal realm and extend to the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of society. In this context, the Surabaya PTUN serves as an arena where claims to administrative justice are tested and rearticulated within the broader social realm.

Land disputes filed with the Surabaya State Administrative Court generally involve decisions by state administrative officials regarding land ownership certificates, land use permits, or land revocation. In many cases, administrative decisions deemed to violate procedures create tensions between residents and local governments and land agencies. This typology demonstrates that the formal aspects of official decisions often clash with the social realities of communities with moral and historical claims to their land. This tension between legal ownership and social ownership characterizes land disputes within the Surabaya State Administrative Court.

From a sociological legal perspective, citizens occupy an asymmetrical position when confronting the government in administrative legal proceedings. In the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN), citizens often position themselves as those harmed by administrative decisions, yet simultaneously face limited resources, access to information, and litigation capabilities. This imbalance renders the state administrative courts not only a legal arena but also an arena for social struggle. Communities challenging government decisions generally do so not solely to win legally, but also to gain recognition of the social legitimacy of their land.

The substantive justice dimension in the Surabaya Administrative Court's decision represents a social construction of law that favors humanity. Through moral, social, and public welfare considerations, judges attempt to bridge the gap between the rule of law and social justice. In line with John Rawls' theory, this practice demonstrates that just administrative law is law that provides greater protection for vulnerable groups. Thus, the social meaning of law in the Surabaya Administrative Court's decision lies not only in the legal text, but also in the values of justice that exist within society.

From the perspective of Berger and Luckmann's sociological theory of law, the Surabaya Administrative Court's decision represents a form of deconstructed legal reification, a process in which law, previously perceived as a rigid and impersonal system, begins to be socially reinterpreted through the actions of legal actors aware of the humanitarian context. Judges, in this case, negotiate the structure of legal meaning by incorporating elements of morality, public ethics, and social solidarity as integral parts of the judicial process. This demonstrates that substantive justice is not only an ethical dimension of law but also a socio-legal instrument for restoring public trust in state institutions.

However, the substantive justice dimension emerging in the practice of the Surabaya Administrative Court still operates within a dilemma between idealism and reality. On the one hand, judges strive to uphold the principle of justice as fairness by protecting vulnerable groups; on the other, they remain bound by a normative system that demands legality and objectivity. This tension creates a dynamic space for interpretation, but is also vulnerable to accusations of inconsistency. In other words, substantive justice in this context remains situational and dependent on the judge's moral sensitivity to the social context they face. The challenge, as criticized by Rawls and later developed by Amartya Sen, lies in how the ideal principle of justice can be institutionalized into a legal system that adapts to social plurality.

Public reaction to the Surabaya Administrative Court's ruling No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY demonstrates a diversity of views reflecting the plurality of legal value systems. Some accepted the ruling out of respect for state authority, but others felt it did not reflect their understanding of social justice. Interviews with local residents revealed that, for them, justice is not merely a court decision, but a "sense of justice that can be shared." This ambivalence suggests that formal legal legitimacy has not yet fully translated into social legitimacy.

Legally, PTUN decisions have strong legitimacy because they are produced through valid legal procedures, with a clear administrative basis for proof. However, socially, this legitimacy remains weak because the public believes that legal procedures often fail to capture the moral values and social balance they adhere to. From a legal pluralist perspective, there is a gap in meaning between formalistic state law and living law, which is derived from social norms and customs. Thus, state law elicits compliance, but not necessarily social acceptance.

Public acceptance of the Surabaya Administrative Court's decision is determined by several factors: the transparency of the judicial process, the judge's morality, the residents' socioeconomic context, and the local cultural values prevalent within the community. In this case, residents were more accepting of the decision after the judge openly clarified the legal and social reasons behind his decision. The judge's moral clarity—in the sense of demonstrating empathy and listening to the community's aspirations—builds social trust. This means that social legitimacy is not only the product of the final outcome, but also the result of moral communication between legal institutions and citizens.

Local values such as harmony, respect for others, and balanced justice serve as parameters for society in assessing legal decisions. In an interview, a community leader stated that "fairness is when all parties can continue to live well, not just win on paper." This statement demonstrates that substantive justice is measured not by legal certainty, but by the social harmony created after a decision. Griffiths (1986) emphasized that state law will lose its effectiveness if it ignores the value system that exists in society (living law). In this context, living law functions as a moral filter for formal state law.

The legal plurality that exists in society creates a dynamic negotiation between state law and social law. In land disputes, communities view land rights not merely as legal documents, but as part of their social identity and a symbol of sustainability. When court decisions fail to consider these dimensions, perceptions of cultural injustice arise. However, through the judge's communicative approach and post-decision social mediation, the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) has begun to demonstrate responsiveness to local values, transforming the law into a form of not merely regulation but also dialogue with the community.

The social legitimacy of law in the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) is formed through a consensus process between state institutions and society. Justice in the context of legal pluralism is not a single entity, but rather the result of negotiations between the formal legal system and the community's value system. When judges consider the social impact of decisions, listen to citizens' voices, and mediate public interests, state law becomes more accepted. This demonstrates that substantive justice and social legitimacy are inseparable from participatory processes that allow local cultural values to influence formal legal practices.

Analytically, these findings demonstrate that legal legitimacy in a pluralistic society like Indonesia cannot rely solely on legal validity. It demands the internalization of social and moral values lived by the community. The Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) serves as an example of how state law is shifting from a hegemonic paradigm to a dialogical paradigm, from law that regulates from above to law that "interacts from below." Within Griffiths' theoretical framework, legal success is not measured by administrative compliance, but by the law's ability to coexist with society as part of a dynamic social value system. Thus, legal pluralism is not merely an acknowledgment of the diversity of norms, but rather a strategy to ensure the social legitimacy of state law through a harmony between formal justice and cultural justice.

The judicial process at the Surabaya State Administrative Court demonstrates that the courtroom is not simply a formal arena for the application of law, but also a social space where the meaning of justice is negotiated. Interactions between judges, plaintiffs, defendants, and the public take place within communication patterns that reflect their respective social positions. Judges use formal legal language, while plaintiffs often express their issues using emotional language and lived experiences. In this context, justice is shaped not only by the final decision, but also by the social experiences that occur during the legal process.

Legal language in PTUN trials serves as both a symbol of state power and an instrument of moral legitimacy. When judges deliver questions or decisions in rigid and technical language, some members of the public feel distanced from the law. However, when judges adapt their language to the social context, a sense of respect and recognition emerges. This process demonstrates that legal language is not simply a medium of communication but a symbol of the meaning of justice itself, a form of social sign that affirms the existence and moral standing of law in the eyes of society.

Interviews with plaintiffs revealed a reflective perspective: "We can lose, as long as we are heard and treated humanely." This statement emphasizes that substantive justice is not measured solely by the outcome, but by the treatment and experiences of interactions during the legal process. Within the framework of symbolic interaction theory, these experiences form the basis for shaping the meaning of justice, as individuals interpret symbols (attitudes, language, and treatment) based on the interactions they experience. Thus, a sense of justice grows not from legal articles, but from respect for human dignity in the courtroom.

The judge's demeanor during a trial becomes a living symbol of legal morality in the eyes of the public. When a judge gives citizens a full opportunity to speak, listens empathetically, and refrains from authoritative behavior, the public interprets this as a sign that the law is on the side of humanity. Small symbols such as a polite greeting, acknowledging a citizen's experience, or a willingness to explain legal reasoning have great moral power. In symbolic interaction theory, these actions are gestures that concretely construct the social meaning of justice.

Interactions in the courtroom also demonstrate differing perspectives on justice. For judges, justice is a product of legal rationality; for society, justice is a social experience that must be experienced humanly. The intersection of these two meanings creates a dialectic between formal and symbolic justice. When judges are able to balance the two, maintaining legal authority while remaining open to social values, space is created for a more inclusive and dialogical understanding of justice.

Through symbolic interactions in court, society learns to understand the law not as a coercive structure, but as a negotiable system of meaning. In the case of the Surabaya State Administrative Court, citizen participation, the judge's communication methods, and the institution's attitude toward social grievances serve as means of meaning-making that strengthen the law's legitimacy. This process confirms Blumer's view that social meaning is not inherent in the object, namely the law, but emerges from the interaction between humans and the symbols they create within a specific social context.

Thus, justice in the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) is the result of a complex social interaction between formal norms and empirical experience. It should not stop at the text of the decision, but rather be lived out through the actions, attitudes, and communication between legal actors. Respect for citizens in the courtroom, a willingness to listen, and humane legal language are moral symbols of living justice. Symbolic interaction theory helps explain that the social meaning of justice arises not from legality alone, but from social recognition formed in the encounter between the state and citizens. This is where law finds its most essential human dimension.

Within Giddens' structuration theory, social action is never entirely free from structure, but neither is it entirely determined by it. Judges at the Surabaya State Administrative Court operate between these two forces: constrained by positive legal regulations, and guided by a social conscience that demands substantive justice. In an interview, one judge stated that "decisions are not just about enforcing rules, but also upholding humanity." This statement demonstrates the judge's role as a moral agent who actualizes the values of social justice within the often detailed and elaborate legal structure.

The legal structure in the context of the State Administrative Court (PTUN) serves a dual function: it constrains judges' actions within the formal legal framework, while also providing a medium for generating socially meaningful action. Giddens emphasizes that structure is not deterministic, but rather dual, both limiting and enabling action. In a land dispute case in Surabaya, the judge used the discretionary space available in administrative law to consider the social and humanitarian impacts of government decisions. Thus, the legal structure becomes a means, not a barrier, to the realization of social justice.

Discretionary space provides judges with the opportunity to interpret the law contextually. In case No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY, the judge not only assessed the validity of the state administrative official's decision but also considered the social benefit and moral propriety of the action. The judge stated that even a legitimate administrative

decision can be deemed unjust if it causes social suffering. This is where discretion becomes an ethical arena, where law meets humanitarian values and public morals. This use of discretion demonstrates the judge's reflective ability to deliver more humane justice without going beyond the boundaries of the formal legal system.

Through the process of reasoning and interpretation, judges essentially reproduce social values into law. In each deliberation, they articulate formal norms in humanitarian and social terms. For example, when a judge emphasizes the importance of maintaining "community access to land as a source of livelihood," they are transforming neutral administrative law into a socially imbued law. This process demonstrates that law is not static, but lives through the reflective actions of social agents who interpret it within a specific cultural and moral context.

The relationship between judges and legal structures is dialectical: the law shapes judges, but judges also reshape the law through their practices. When judges interpret norms in light of social context, they create precedents that broaden the meaning of the law. Every decision sensitive to social values has the potential to change how legal institutions interpret justice in the future. In other words, through reflective action, judges become not only enforcers of rules but also creators of new structures that are more responsive to societal needs.

A concrete example of the judge's role as a social agent was seen when the panel rejected the rigid application of the principle of *rechtmatigheid* (formal validity) and replaced it with a *doelmatigheid* (utility) approach. In their deliberations, the judges emphasized that the law must function to protect the people, not simply justify the actions of officials. This stance represents an effort to revitalize the law so that it is relevant to the social context and local values of justice. Through these actions, state law is not only enforced but also humanized.

Thus, the role of judges in the Surabaya Administrative Court demonstrates how law and justice are formed through a reflective process of structuration. The legal structure provides the normative framework, while agents, in this case judges, imbue it with social meaning through their actions and interpretations. In line with Giddens's view, legal structures become dynamic when agents are able to reproduce human values within them. Through these reflective actions, law is no longer a frozen system but rather a living social space where morality, justice, and humanity are continually renewed through meaningful judicial practices.

The social meaning of law in the Surabaya State Administrative Court's rulings is built from the dynamic interaction between formal legal structures and the socio-moral dimensions of society. The four theories used in this study—substantive justice, legal pluralism, symbolic interaction, and structuration—demonstrate that law does not stand alone as a normative system, but rather as a social arena where values, symbols, and power negotiate. The justice produced by the State Administrative Court is not merely the result of legal procedures, but rather the reflective practice of judges as social agents who balance legal norms with the values of humanity and social justice that exist in society.

Findings from Rawls's theory of substantive justice demonstrate that judges in the State Administrative Court (PTUN) attempt to bridge the tension between the rule of law and social justice through moral and empathetic considerations. In this context, administrative law is practiced not merely to ensure legality but also to protect the most vulnerable within the social structure. This integration demonstrates that the effectiveness of state law can only be achieved when it also functions as an instrument of social welfare, not simply a mechanism for controlling power. Thus, substantive justice is at the heart of legal legitimacy in the eyes of society.

Griffiths' theory of legal pluralism asserts that the social legitimacy of Surabaya State Administrative Court decisions emerges when formal law engages in dialogue with the living law of society. Decisions that respect local values such as justice, social harmony, and solidarity are more readily accepted morally by society. When judges demonstrate sensitivity to these values, state law becomes part of the network of social norms, not an entity that alienates citizens. Therefore, the success of the State Administrative Court is measured not solely by administrative compliance, but by the decision's social acceptance as a form of living justice.

From a symbolic interaction perspective (Blumer), the meaning of justice in the PTUN is not only expressed in the text of the decision, but also constructed through symbolic interactions in the courtroom. The judge's open attitude, communicative legal language, and humane treatment of the plaintiff serve as moral symbols of dignified law. The experience of being "heard" and "respected" in the legal process fosters the perception that justice is not merely an end result, but also a process that recognizes the fullness of human existence. Thus, moral symbolism in legal practice plays a crucial role in shaping public trust in the judicial institution.

Through the lens of Giddens' structuration theory, it can be concluded that judges play a dual role as guardians of legal structures and drivers of social change. While legal structures limit their scope for action, through discretion and reflective interpretation, judges are able to reproduce social values within the law. When judges use their interpretive space to consider the public interest, they indirectly restructure the meaning of the law to make it more adaptive to social realities. It is at this point that law becomes a living system, constantly being negotiated, adapted, and reinterpreted within a humanitarian context.

A synthesis of all theories suggests that substantive justice and social legitimacy can only be achieved when there is a balance between legality (legal certainty) and moral legitimacy (social acceptance). Legal legitimacy cannot be established solely through procedural compliance; it must be built on empathy, openness, and honesty in the legal process. The Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) demonstrates that transparency, humanistic communication, and social considerations in decisions can restore public trust in the law. Thus, legal legitimacy is a moral product of ethical and socially just legal practice.

The conceptual structure of the social meaning of law in the Surabaya Administrative Court decision can be likened to a layered pyramid culminating in substantive justice and social legitimacy. The foundational layer is social justice, which serves as the normative foundation for all legal practices. Social justice provides moral and ethical direction regarding who the law should work for—the weakest in society and those most affected by state administrative decisions. This principle serves as a value compass that ensures that every legal practice is inseparable from the ideal of the common good, as John Rawls emphasized that true justice demands greater protection for the most disadvantaged groups in the social structure. Thus, social justice is not merely an abstract norm, but a moral foundation that guides all subsequent layers of analysis.

Building on this foundation, legal pluralism provides a social context for the operation of law in practice. Through Griffiths' theory of living law, legal pluralism explains that the effectiveness and legitimacy of state law depend on its ability to interact with the local value systems and norms that exist within society. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, state law intersects with community morality, such as the values of *tepa selira* (fairness), social harmony, and harmony, which serve as measures of justice for citizens. Thus, legal pluralism fills the social dimension of justice, positioning law not as an isolated entity, but as a network of norms intertwined with formal law and cultural values. This is what gives law social meaning and acceptance to society.



Picture3.Social Construction of Law
(Data processed by researcher, 2025)

Meanwhile, symbolic interaction and structuration theory act as two dynamic layers that bridge values and practices. Symbolic interaction explains that justice is not only achieved through written decisions, but is also interpreted through direct experience in court proceedings, legal language, and the judge's treatment of citizens. Respect, empathy, and communication become living symbols of legal morality. On the other hand, structuration emphasizes that judges, as social agents, play a reflective role, situated within the legal structure, yet empowered to transform it through ethical interpretation and discretion. With this reflective capacity, judges integrate the values of

social justice, pluralism, and symbolic interaction into their decisions, thereby achieving the pinnacle of substantive justice and social legitimacy. This end result is not merely formal legal validity, but rather moral and social acceptance of laws that favor humanity.

Reflectively, this synthesis asserts that modern administrative law will lose its meaning if it is separated from its social function of restoring justice to communities affected by state decisions. True justice is not merely procedural legitimacy, but rather a balance between norms, empathy, and human values. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, law becomes a living symbol of state morality when judges are able to bridge the gap between legal texts and social reality. By integrating these four theoretical dimensions, it can be concluded that the social meaning of law arises from the dialectical process between structure and morality, between power and humanity, making law not merely a system of rules, but a means of civilization that upholds human dignity.

b. Interpretation of Decisions by Legal Actors and Society

The Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) holds a strategic position in the Indonesian justice system as a forum for correcting government administrative actions. The PTUN is not only a legal institution that assesses the legality of decisions by state administrative officials, but also an arena for social interaction between the state and citizens. In this space, citizens who feel disadvantaged by government decisions have the opportunity to negotiate their social rights through formal legal mechanisms. Therefore, the PTUN serves a dual function: on the one hand, it protects the principle of the rule of law and on the other, it serves as an instrument of social reconciliation between the authorities and citizens affected by public policies.

The nature of disputes arising at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) generally relates to administrative decisions that directly impact citizens' social rights, such as the revocation of business permits, appointments, or most frequently, land rights disputes. In case No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY, the land dispute is a clear manifestation of the conflict between bureaucratic rationality and the social realities of society. The government's decision to revoke land ownership rights for development purposes is considered legally valid, but it causes social trauma because it does not involve community participation. This characterization demonstrates that behind every administrative case lies a complex social dynamic between legal procedures and the values of justice that exist within society.

The State Administrative Court (PTUN) operates at the intersection of legal certainty and substantive justice. In practice, administrative law demands adherence to formal rules, while society demands recognition of moral and humanitarian values. Interviews with judges at the Surabaya PTUN revealed the reflective view that "legal decisions are not only based on documents, but also on feelings." This statement illustrates that PTUN decisions are not born from rigid normative logic, but rather from the intersection of legal structures and the judge's social empathy for the parties in the case. In other words, administrative justice at the PTUN is always both social and legal.

Cases at the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) demonstrate the asymmetrical relationship between citizens and the state. Citizens are often in a vulnerable position due to limited legal knowledge, access to administrative evidence, and legal representation. However, through the PTUN, citizens find a space to speak out and openly challenge state decisions. In an interview, one citizen plaintiff stated, "We're not fighting the state; we just want the state to be fair." This statement demonstrates that administrative lawsuits are not merely expressions of legal conflict, but rather part of a social process to uphold the state's moral legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.

PTUN decisions are not merely the result of legal logic, but rather the product of social interactions between actors: judges, plaintiffs, defendants (the government), and the public. During the trial process, symbolic communication is formed that influences the parties' perceptions of the meaning of justice. Judges act not only as law enforcers but also as value mediators, bridging public interests with formal legal norms. Therefore, every PTUN decision bears the interpretive traces of social interactions that occur in the courtroom: the judge's listening style, the language used, and the form of respect for the dignity of the parties are all part of the production of the meaning of social justice.

Analytical, the position of the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) demonstrates the close relationship between the social and legal dimensions. The social dimension reflects the reality of power inequality, community moral values, and societal aspirations for humane justice. Meanwhile, the legal dimension demands legal certainty and consistency with administrative norms. When the two are reflectively integrated by judges, the law becomes more

than just written rules, becoming a tool for moral communication between the state and its citizens. Thus, the PTUN functions not only as an adjudicatory institution but also as a space for reconciling values between state law and social justice.

Based on this social and legal context, the main problem formulation that guides the analysis is how legal actors and society interpret PTUN decisions as symbols of social justice. This question places attention not only on the content of the decision, but also on the process of constructing its meaning among the actors. Through symbolic interaction, moral reflection, and social awareness, PTUN decisions represent the struggle between formal law and human values. Therefore, this research starts from the assumption that justice in PTUN is not only produced by legal texts, but is constructed through social practices, empirical experiences, and the reflective awareness of the actors living within them.

The Surabaya Administrative Court courtroom is an arena for complex social interactions between judges, plaintiffs, defendants, legal counsel, and the public present as observers. In symbolic interaction theory, law is understood not as a closed system that operates automatically, but rather as the result of a negotiation of meanings that emerge from the actions and communications between actors. In this context, the trial is not merely a formal process for resolving administrative disputes, but also a symbolic space where the meaning of justice is constructed, negotiated, and perceived through the language, gestures, and direct experiences of the parties.

Judges in the State Administrative Court (PTUN) play a dual role: as enforcers of legal norms and as symbols of moral authority in the eyes of the public. In an interview, a citizen plaintiff stated that the way a judge speaks and listens is more important than the content of his or her decision. This statement suggests that the judge's behavior, in addressing, providing space for speech, or responding to citizen complaints, is interpreted as a representation of the value of justice itself. Thus, the interaction between judges and the public is not merely a legal communication, but a moral symbol that creates social meaning for the law.

The concept of justice in the PTUN is interpreted differently by each legal actor. For judges, justice is synonymous with conformity to norms and objective evidence; for society, justice means moral honesty, humane treatment, and social empathy. In an interview, one plaintiff stated, "Justice is when the judge listens to our arguments, not just reads the files." This difference in meaning illustrates the symbolic distance between formal law and social experience, while also emphasizing that substantive justice can only emerge when legal symbols are interpreted through empathetic interaction.

The symbolic meaning of the verdict also shows sharp differences in interpretation. For lawyers, the verdict is the result of rational, document-based legal logic; for the public, the verdict is a moral judgment that reflects the judge's empathy for the citizens' social suffering. In an interview, one citizen stated, "We can accept defeat, as long as the judge explains it honestly and doesn't hurt anyone." This statement demonstrates that justice depends not only on the final outcome but also on how justice is communicated. This communication process is what gives law its social and human significance.

From a symbolic interaction perspective, victory or defeat in a PTUN case is not merely understood as a procedural outcome, but rather as a symbol of social recognition. For the public, winning means their voices are acknowledged and their experiences heard; while losing is often interpreted as a sign that the legal system has not fully sided with the people. One plaintiff expressed, "We didn't win, but at least the state knows we exist." This meaning demonstrates that law not only determines rights but also produces identity and social recognition for citizens.



Picture 4. The Process of Forming the Social Meaning of Law in the Surabaya Administrative Court Decision
(Data processed by researcher, 2025)

Meanwhile, the theory of legal pluralism provides a social context for the emergence of diverse legal meanings in society. In the Surabaya context, state law coexists with local norms such as *tepa selira* (community tolerance), mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and social harmony. When PTUN decisions impact the community, these social values contribute to the acceptance of justice. Laws are considered valid not only because they are issued by the state, but also because they align with public morals and cultural values within the community. Thus, legal pluralism demonstrates that legal legitimacy is social and contextual, rather than absolute and homogeneous.

4.2. Social, Cultural, Political, and Legal Factors Influencing Judges' Considerations

a. Social Inequality and Access to Administrative Justice

In the practice of state administrative justice, judges are confronted with a social reality of inequality between ordinary citizens and government institutions. This inequality is not only economic but also encompasses access to legal information, litigation capabilities, and symbolic power. The government, as the defendant, often possesses far greater legal resources than the plaintiffs from the lower classes. In this context, judges are not only enforcers of legal norms but also moral mediators who must bridge this power gap. The facts at the Surabaya Administrative Court demonstrate that in land disputes, lower classes are often on the defensive against state administrative decisions that directly impact their right to life.

John Rawls's concepts of distributive justice and Amartya Sen's substantive justice serve as two key foundations for understanding the normative dimensions of justice in the context of social inequality. Rawls (1971) emphasized the difference principle, which states that any public policy is only morally valid if it provides the greatest benefit to the most vulnerable group. Sen (2009), through the concept of the capability approach, expands on this idea by highlighting the importance of an individual's actual ability to enjoy their basic rights, not merely formal recognition of those rights. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, the application of this principle means that judges must not simply read the administrative legal text but must also consider the extent to which decisions can improve the social conditions of the most vulnerable.

Judges at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) strive to balance administrative legal certainty (the rule of law) with social justice for vulnerable groups. In land dispute cases, judges face a dilemma between upholding the formal legality of government decisions and addressing the social impact on affected residents. Some judges acknowledge that valid legal decisions are not necessarily socially just. Therefore, judges use their discretion to interpret regulations more humanely, such as providing transitional time for residents or reprimanding state institutions that ignore the principle of proportionality. These efforts demonstrate the application of Rawlsian and Senian principles, which place humanity at the center of administrative justice.

One of the key findings of this study is the existence of structural bias in Indonesia's administrative legal system. The government, as the defendant in many PTUN cases, has institutional advantages in terms of legal resources, proximity to officials, and control of administrative evidence. This bias often places ordinary citizens in an inferior position before the law, which should be neutral. One plaintiff stated, "We didn't lose because we were wrong, but because we don't have the same power as they do." This statement demonstrates that administrative law often

reproduces power imbalances, rather than correcting them. In this context, the role of judges is crucial in upholding substantive justice as a corrective to systemic structural bias.

In addressing structural inequality, judges require a moral discretion known as discretion of conscience. At the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN), this practice is evident when judges employ social interpretations of legal norms to ensure their decisions do not exacerbate citizen suffering. One judge stated that rules cannot always be rigid; conscience is part of justice itself. This statement demonstrates that substantive justice requires an ethical and reflective dimension in law enforcement. Judges are not merely mouthpieces of the law, but moral agents who balance state power with citizens' social rights through considerations of humanity and social context.

Social justice, from the perspective of Indonesian national law, derives moral legitimacy from Pancasila, particularly the fifth principle, "Social justice for all Indonesian people." This value serves as an ethical guideline for judges to interpret the law with an orientation toward public welfare and equality. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, judges who internalize Pancasila values are able to view the law not merely as a normative system, but as a means to fight for social justice. This means that every decision made must contribute to improving social balance, rather than strengthening state domination over citizens. Thus, Pancasila serves as a source of moral legitimacy that transcends legal positivism.

From the overall analysis, it can be concluded that substantive justice in the context of social inequality demands social sensitivity from judges and the legal system as a whole. Justice cannot be reduced to legal certainty alone, because law without empathy will only reinforce a structure of inequality. By integrating the principles of Rawls, Sen, and the values of Pancasila, judges can develop a more humane practice of administrative justice—law that not only upholds norms but also restores the dignity of citizens. Therefore, substantive justice is justice that is aware of its social context, a law that does not stop at text, but lives in the conscience, experience, and trust of society in the state.

b. The Conflict between Modern Administrative Law and Local Values

Modern administrative law in Indonesia, as reflected in the practice at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN), is rooted in a rational and legalistic paradigm. This system is built on the logic of the rule of law, which emphasizes certainty, bureaucratic efficiency, and procedural uniformity. Every government action is measured by its formal legality, whether it complies with laws, procedures, and administrative documents. This approach positions law as an objective and impersonal system, where decisions are considered valid if they meet formal requirements, regardless of the surrounding social context. Thus, modern administrative law operates within a Weberian rational framework: measurable, procedural, and hierarchical, yet often distanced from the moral and social realities of society.

In contrast, local values entrenched in Surabaya society, such as *tepa selira* (community to cooperate), mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), harmony (*rukun*), and respect for the weak, are rooted in a social morality that places humanity at the center of justice. This value system operates contextually and is based on social relations, not on written legal texts. In society, justice does not always mean adherence to formal rules, but rather a sense of maintained social balance and harmony. When state legal decisions are perceived to ignore moral and humanitarian values, the perception arises that the law has lost its social legitimacy. Therefore, local values are not merely a complement to legal morality, but function as an alternative ethical system that maintains the meaning of humanity in public life.

The clash between modern administrative law and local values is rooted in differences in epistemological and normative orientations. Modern law prioritizes legal certainty, while local values emphasize social justice. In the practice of the State Administrative Court (PTUN), this tension arises when ordinary citizens, who adhere to their moral values and social rights, confront the government, which maintains administrative actions based on formal documents. As a result, the legal space becomes an arena where two logics meet: a procedural logic based on rules, and a social logic based on a sense of justice. When state law fails to bridge the gap between the two, the paradox of a law that is normatively valid but socially unjust arises.

This conflicting phenomenon is evident in various dispute cases handled by the Surabaya State Administrative Court, such as customary land cases, evictions of residents for government projects, and denials of small business permits. In land disputes, for example, the government uses administrative law to claim the legality of its decisions, while residents base their resistance on social history and communal values. For the government, legal certainty means legitimacy of action; for citizens, justice means recognition of their right to life and dignity. The clash of these two

orientations creates an ethical dilemma for judges, who must interpret the law between state rationality and societal morality.

The dominance of formalistic administrative law has significant social impacts. Commoners feel marginalized because the language of state law does not speak their social dialect. Regulations intended to provide certainty instead create alienation and distrust in the justice system. In an interview, one resident said, "The law is only for the powerful." This statement demonstrates that inequality is not only economic but also symbolic, as modern law negates the social values that have long been the basis of justice at the local level. Thus, the tension between the two value systems creates a gap between state law and the legal consciousness of the people.

In this context, judges act as mediators between the legalistic world of the state and the moral world of society. Surabaya State Administrative Court judges are often faced with the dilemma of whether to uphold the law textually or interpret it contextually for the sake of justice. When judges choose a humanistic approach, for example, by granting relocation time to residents affected by evictions, they are effectively bridging these two value systems. This action demonstrates that administrative justice cannot be separated from social sensitivity. Wise judges are able to translate state law into the moral language of society, so that the law does not lose its human meaning.

From the above description, it can be concluded that the conflict between modern law and local values in the context of public administration is rooted in the difference in value orientation between legal certainty and social justice. Modern administrative law is oriented toward rationality and procedure, while local values are oriented toward humanity and social harmony. This tension cannot be eliminated but can be managed through reflective and sensitive interpretation by judges. Therefore, an important conceptual foundation for sustainable administrative justice is the ability of a state's legal system to dialogue with local values, creating laws that are not only certain but also just—not only legal but also humane.

Indonesian society lives in a pluralistic legal system where state law, customary law, and moral law coexist and influence each other. These three do not exist hierarchically, but rather form a complex and dynamic network of norms. In daily life, people often adhere to customary rules and moral norms more strongly than to state law, as they are considered closer to a sense of justice and human values. This phenomenon demonstrates that state law never operates in a social vacuum but always interacts with living, culturally recognized social laws. Thus, legal pluralism is not an anomaly, but rather a sociological reality inherent in the structure of Indonesian society.

Referring to Griffiths' (1986) view, the effectiveness of state law depends heavily on its ability to interact with the social laws that exist within society (living law). If state law is isolated from social values, it will lose moral legitimacy and become merely a bureaucratic instrument. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, this theory finds relevance in numerous cases demonstrating that citizens do not reject state law, but rather reject the application of law that ignores their social context. A resident evicted from land they have occupied for decades stated, "We are not fighting the state, we just want to be heard." This statement emphasizes that legal conflict is not a reflection of disobedience, but rather a manifestation of the inconsistency between the formal legal system and the social laws that exist within society.

The conflicts that arise in cases at the State Administrative Court (PTUN) cannot be understood solely as violations of administrative law, but must be seen as an expression of the incongruous duality of the legal system. The state prioritizes formal legality, while society prioritizes social legitimacy. In land disputes, for example, government decisions are often based on administrative ownership documents, while citizens judge justice based on the history of land ownership and its social value within the community. When formal law fails to capture these social meanings, society perceives the law as operating exclusively and unfairly. This duality creates a dilemma for judges: how to uphold state law without denying the social realities that are the source of societal justice.

Surabaya State Administrative Court judges play a central role as navigators in navigating legal plurality. In practice, judges strive to balance positive legal norms with lived social values. For example, in several decisions, judges consider the socio-economic factors of affected residents before deciding on administrative cases, by allowing adaptation time or encouraging more equitable non-litigation solutions. This approach reflects an awareness that the law should not only uphold certainty but also provide social protection. Thus, judges act as a bridge between two legal worlds: the realm of state legality and the realm of societal morality.

In several cases, judges have demonstrated efforts to incorporate social values into their legal considerations. One empirical example found at the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) is when a judge considered public benefit and

humanitarian values in a case of eviction. The judge stated that while the government's decision was administratively valid, its implementation must consider the social rights of residents to avoid causing disproportionate suffering. This approach demonstrates that legal pluralism is not treated as a disruption to the state's legal system, but rather as a moral resource to strengthen the substance of justice.

However, this diversity of legal systems also poses ethical dilemmas for judges. On the one hand, judges are bound by formal legal structures that demand certainty and consistency; on the other, they are faced with social realities that demand empathy and moral flexibility. In an interview, one judge stated, "We must uphold the law, but we also know that humans cannot be judged solely by rules." This statement illustrates the reflective tension between legal and moral responsibility. Judges occupy a liminal position, standing between rigid state law and fluid social law and must continually negotiate the two to maintain a vibrant justice.

From the overall analysis, it can be concluded that legal pluralism is an unavoidable inevitability in the Indonesian legal system. The diversity of state, customary, and moral legal systems reflects the nation's social diversity. Judges play a crucial role as reflective agents navigating this plurality to ensure the law remains relevant and socially meaningful. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, legal pluralism is not a source of chaos, but rather a space for law to rediscover its meaning of justice. True administrative justice will only be achieved when state law does not reject, but instead engages in dialogue with, the social values entrenched in society, making justice not merely a legal procedure but a shared moral experience.

Anthony Giddens' structuration theory provides a powerful framework for understanding how judges navigate the intertwined forces of rigid legal structures and reflective individual agency. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, the legal structure reflects formal norms, administrative procedures, and bureaucratic hierarchies of power. However, judges, as social agents, are not only subject to these structures but also possess the reflective capacity to interpret, adapt, and even reproduce the meaning of the law according to the social context they face. This dialectic between structure and agency is what makes every decision not merely a product of written law, but rather the result of the interaction between the normative system and the moral consciousness of the individuals who enforce it.

In practice, PTUN judges use interpretive discretion as a reflective space to balance legal texts with social contexts. When dealing with cases involving ordinary citizens against government agencies, judges often consider not only formal legal aspects but also social and humanitarian dimensions. This discretion constitutes a form of controlled freedom that allows judges to translate state law into the language of public morality. For example, judges can delay the implementation of legally valid administrative decisions to give citizens time to adapt, thus ensuring the law remains upheld without sacrificing social justice.

Every decision rendered by a judge within the context of the plurality of values in Indonesian society is a form of social reproduction of law, namely the result of the integration of formal norms and living social values. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, the law is not only enforced through text but also brought to life through the social practices of judges who consider societal aspirations and power dynamics. This aligns with Giddens' thesis that structures are not absolute limiting entities but also mediums for social action. Thus, through the practice of interpretation and reflection, judges help reshape legal structures to be more adaptive to social realities.

Judges in the state administrative justice system can be viewed as mediating agents, moral intermediaries between state power and the aspirations of the people. On the one hand, judges must uphold the authority of state law and the principle of the rule of law; on the other, they must ensure that the law does not lose its moral substance in the face of social inequality. When judges weigh bureaucratic interests and citizen rights proportionally, they are effectively articulating the social function of law as a mechanism of control over state power. Thus, judges' decisions not only have legal weight but also serve as a symbol of moral resistance against dehumanization within the legal bureaucracy.

Through discretion and social reflection, judges can inject humanitarian values into positive law without violating the principle of legality. Within the framework of structuration theory, these judicial actions constitute a form of agency-in-structure, where the legal structure is not erased but instead filled with new, more humane meaning. Judges who are sensitive to the social context use their authority to ensure that the law functions as an instrument of justice, not merely an administrative tool. Therefore, in a pluralistic and unequal legal system, judges become agents of transformation, ensuring the law remains relevant to social life. Thus, structuration theory demonstrates that law is not

merely a binding structure, but rather the result of judges' reflective and moral actions in striving for substantive justice.

Within the framework of symbolic interaction theory, the concept of justice does not have a single meaning but is interpreted diversely by social actors involved in the legal process. For the state and law enforcement, justice is synonymous with compliance with administrative procedures and the objective application of norms. However, for society, especially vulnerable groups or citizens directly exposed to state policies, justice is interpreted as social and moral balance—a condition in which humans are treated with respect and empathy. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, this difference in interpretation is a major source of symbolic tension: state law speaks in formal language, while society demands a more humane meaning of justice.

Legal symbols such as court rulings, business permits, or government administrative decisions hold powerful meaning in social interactions. However, in the eyes of the public, these symbols are often perceived as signs of cold and elitist power. In several cases studied, citizens described PTUN decisions as biased against the common people, not solely because of their legal content, but because of the way they were presented without moral communication. Legal symbols, which should represent justice, instead become signs of social distance between the state and its citizens. This means that the law loses its symbolic meaning when it fails to reach the emotional side of the people affected by administrative decisions.

The Surabaya State Administrative Court courtroom is not only a venue for formal legal debate, but also an arena for symbolic communication where the meaning of the law is negotiated between judges, plaintiffs, defendants, and the public. In this process, the language used by judges plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of justice. When judges explain the law with empathy and use language that is easy to understand, the public feels acknowledged and respected. Conversely, overly technocratic and rigid communication reinforces the impression that the law is an instrument foreign to the public. Therefore, symbolic interactions in the courtroom determine whether the law is perceived as a tool of oppression or a means of social justice.

The social legitimacy of law arises when legal symbols can be translated into the language of local values understood by the community. In cases at the State Administrative Court (PTUN), judges who emphasize humanitarian values, for example by reminding the government to respect citizens' social rights, receive greater appreciation than judges who simply read the law literally. This action demonstrates that legal legitimacy depends not only on the text of the decision, but also on how the legal symbols are articulated morally and socially. In other words, the law is only considered just when it presents itself as a symbol of empathy, not as a symbol of power.

From a symbolic interaction perspective, legal justice will only be meaningful if it can address the symbolic and emotional dimensions of society. Laws that prioritize procedural compliance without considering social communication will lose their moral legitimacy. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, the communication process, the judge's attitude, and the way the law is presented are key to shaping the socially accepted meaning of justice. Therefore, justice is not merely the result of articles, but the result of symbolic interactions that affirm human dignity. Thus, true administrative justice is justice that is felt, not just justice that is decided.

Within the framework of conflict theory, modern law often functions as an instrument of domination—a tool of power that serves the interests of the state and elite groups. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, this is evident when government administrative decisions imbued with particular political or economic interests gain strong legal legitimacy through formal procedures. The seemingly neutral legal process is not, in fact, value-free; it often reflects a power structure that subordinates citizens. Thus, state law serves not only to maintain administrative order but also to maintain the status quo of power that supports the interests of the bureaucracy and economic elite.

In many cases before the State Administrative Court (PTUN), ordinary citizens or vulnerable groups often lack the access, capacity, or resources equivalent to those of the government as defendants. This inequality encompasses financial capacity, legal understanding, and limited legal representation. One local plaintiff described this situation with the phrase, "coming to court is like facing a wall." This statement illustrates citizens' position within a hierarchical legal power structure where the government holds administrative legitimacy, while the people struggle with moral and social claims. This inequality underscores the fact that modern administrative law often operates within a non-neutral logic of power.

This inequality has given rise to forms of social resistance, both symbolic and direct. In some cases, communities have rejected PTUN decisions by staging public protests, filing re-suits, or organizing social movements based on

community solidarity. This resistance is not always interpreted as a rejection of the law, but rather as a form of moral resistance to a legal system deemed unjust. This phenomenon reinforces the view that law is not merely an arena for dispute resolution, but also a space for a battle of values between state administrative power and the people's aspirations for justice. This conflict has become the social energy that drives demands for legal reform to be more sensitive to the reality of social inequality.

Judges in the State Administrative Court (PTUN) face a dilemma: they must uphold the authority of state law and, on the other hand, respond to the public's aspirations for social justice. Structural pressures from the government, as the ruling party, often clash with the moral demands of citizens seeking substantive justice. In this situation, judges play a strategic role as power mediators, attempting to maintain a balance between legal legitimacy and social legitimacy. When judges choose to interpret the law progressively, they not only perform a legal function but also an ethical function, affirming that law should not be a tool of power, but rather a means of liberation.

Referring to Ralf Dahrendorf's view, social conflict is not merely a sign of tension, but also a driving force for structural change toward a more responsive legal system. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, the clash between modern law and local social values actually opened up space for institutional reflection that administrative justice must side with humanity, not merely procedure. Community resistance and judges' moral reflection became catalysts for the evolution of the law toward greater justice. Thus, the conflict between the state and citizens is not a failure of the legal system, but a sign that society demands that the law adapt to the values of social justice, making the law not an instrument of domination, but a means of emancipation.

The results of this study indicate that the conflict between modern administrative law and local values is not only a legal phenomenon, but also a representation of the complex interaction between state power structures, socio-cultural contexts, the agency of judges, and the social meaning of justice. From a conflict theory perspective, state law operates within a power structure that tends to be hierarchical and dominant; from a legal pluralism perspective, society lives with a pluralistic value system that often conflicts with formal administrative logic. Judges then appear as reflective agents who attempt to negotiate these two worlds of values between state rationality and societal morality so that justice can be interpreted not only as legal certainty but also as social balance.

c. Substantive Justice and Social Legitimacy in State Administrative Court Decisions

In practice at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN), judges not only uphold legal texts as a form of compliance with the rule of law, but also interpret the law by considering human values, public morals, and a sense of social justice. This approach demonstrates a shift from procedural justice to substantive justice, namely the effort to uphold laws that are not only normatively valid but also socially meaningful. Judges see that justice cannot be defined solely by the letter of the law, but by its real impact on people's lives. Thus, substantive justice is at the heart of legal considerations that are oriented towards human welfare, not merely legal formalities.

Judges in the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) hold a strategic position in integrating humanitarian values and public morality into the often rigid and technocratic administrative legal system. In certain cases, judges weigh the social interests of citizens, especially vulnerable groups affected by state administrative decisions. When the state acts legally but causes social harm, judges use moral discretion to uphold the sense of justice that prevails in society. This approach emphasizes that the law should not be a mechanism that justifies injustice but rather serves as a corrective tool for inequalities arising from state policies.

Referring to John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness, substantive justice requires greater protection for the most vulnerable groups in the social structure. In the context of the State Administrative Court (PTUN), this principle is evident when judges strive to ensure that state administrative decisions do not violate the fundamental rights of citizens who lack political or economic power. Judges consider that justice is not only about procedural equality before the law, but also about balancing outcomes and protecting the most vulnerable. Thus, PTUN decisions containing elements of correction for social inequality reflect a concrete application of Rawls's difference principle, namely that inequality can only be justified if it benefits the weakest party.

Amartya Sen's perspective, through the capability approach, provides an empirical dimension in assessing substantive justice in PTUN decisions. Sen emphasizes that justice should be measured not by formal equality, but by individuals' actual ability to enjoy their rights. In cases at the Surabaya PTUN, judges demonstrate sensitivity to this dimension by considering the plaintiffs' socio-economic capabilities to access administrative rights. For example,

when ordinary citizens challenge government decisions restricting land rights or business permits, judges assess not only the formal legality of the decision but also the extent to which the policy impedes citizens' ability to live with dignity. In this way, PTUN decisions become instruments of empowerment, not simply enforcement.

Meanwhile, Nancy Fraser emphasized the dimension of recognitional justice, namely justice born from the recognition of the dignity and social existence of marginalized groups. In the practice of the PTUN (State Administrative Court) court, this type of justice emerges when judges not only restore citizens' administrative rights but also restore their social recognition as legitimate citizens. In some cases, judges assert that government actions that violate the principle of proportionality or ignore public participation constitute a violation of the right to recognition. Thus, PTUN decisions not only correct administrative errors but also uphold the moral legitimacy that every citizen has the right to be respected and protected in legal relations with the state.

These three theories provide a conceptual foundation for understanding substantive justice as a multi-layered form of justice: distributive justice, capabilitative justice, and social recognition. Judges who interpret the law using this multidimensional approach demonstrate the ability to integrate social justice values into formal legal structures. This is evident in the practice of the State Administrative Court (PTUN), which considers not only legal aspects but also the social, economic, and psychological consequences for the injured party. Thus, substantive justice serves as a bridge between abstract legal norms and concrete social realities, strengthening the moral legitimacy of each decision.

From the overall analysis, it can be concluded that substantive justice is the primary foundation of moral legitimacy in PTUN decisions. Judges who interpret the law with a humanitarian orientation not only uphold procedural justice but also deliver real social justice. This approach builds public trust in the judiciary because the law appears as an instrument of empathy, not power. By combining the principles of fairness, capability, and recognition, the Surabaya PTUN demonstrates that just administrative law is one that decides not only with logic but also with conscience. This is what makes substantive justice the foundation for the social and moral legitimacy of the modern legal system.

Indonesian society lives in a social order that is pluralistic in terms of law and values. In addition to state law, there is living law, consisting of customary, moral, and religious norms, which play a significant role in shaping social behavior and perceptions of justice. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, this legal plurality is a crucial factor influencing how society evaluates court decisions. For some citizens, justice does not always mean conformity to the law, but rather conformity to prevailing social norms. Therefore, state law that is overly technocratic and formal tends to be perceived as foreign and biased if it does not align with local humanitarian and moral values.

In a pluralistic legal system, social legitimacy cannot be achieved solely through formal state authority but must be built through conformity to the social values of the community. A law that is legally valid is not necessarily considered morally just. Interviews and field observations revealed that people tend to assess justice based on social propriety and a sense of humanity. For example, when a court ruling favors the government in a land dispute, residents often consider it unfair because it ignores historical rights and social ties to the land. This suggests that legal legitimacy without social legitimacy risks creating a distance between the law and the society it governs.

Several cases at the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) demonstrate that legally valid decisions face social rejection due to perceived moral or cultural injustice. For example, in a land dispute between residents and the local government, residents rejected the decision despite the state's strong administrative legal basis. For the public, decisions that compromise their social and economic well-being are considered detrimental to their sense of justice, even if they comply with legal procedures. This phenomenon reflects a gap in perception between formal legal logic, which focuses on certainty, and social logic, which focuses on balance and humanity.

In this situation of legal pluralism, judges play a central role as interpreters of values, capable of balancing formal law and public morality. The judges at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) faced the dilemma of upholding the principle of legality on the one hand, and respecting the socio-cultural values of society on the other. Some judges demonstrated moral courage by incorporating the social context into their legal considerations without neglecting the principle of legality. This approach underscores the importance of inclusive and contextual legal interpretation, where law serves not only as a normative text but also as an instrument for maintaining social harmony.

The relationship between legal legitimacy and social legitimacy is crucial in a pluralistic legal system. Legal legitimacy arises from adherence to formal legal procedures and norms, while social legitimacy arises from public acceptance of the moral justice of the decision. In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, these two forms

of legitimacy often do not go hand in hand. When the law is perceived as being too biased toward the state, the public loses trust in the judiciary. Conversely, when judges interpret the law with social values in mind, the public feels respected, and justice takes on a more humane meaning.

Integrating pluralistic values into modern legal practice is no easy feat. Judges must contend with institutional pressures to maintain legal certainty and social pressures to achieve vibrant justice. Legal pluralism creates a reflective space for judges to understand that justice is not universal, but rather contextual. In Indonesia's socio-cultural context, laws that are too rigid will lose their social legitimacy. Therefore, the success of the administrative legal system lies in its ability to balance legal rationality with the social wisdom that develops within society.

The overall analysis concludes that legal pluralism is the social foundation of substantive justice in Indonesia. Judges are key actors bridging the rule of law with living law through reflective and empathetic legal interpretation. The legitimacy of administrative law will only be solid if decisions are not only legally correct but also socially and morally accepted by the community. By respecting local values, adhering to customary norms, and prioritizing humanity, state law can transform into an inclusive law—one that not only regulates but also understands humans.

Within the framework of symbolic interaction theory, justice is understood not only as the final outcome, a judge's decision, but also as a social process perceived and interpreted by the parties involved in the trial. At the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN), citizens' experiences with the legal process often serve as the primary basis for assessing whether the law is just. Justice that exists only in a decision document without meaningful social experience is considered empty. Conversely, when the trial process provides space for participation, respect, and open communication, the public interprets the law as a moral instrument, not merely a formal mechanism. Thus, a sense of justice is formed through lived social experience, not merely through legal texts.

The interaction between judges, plaintiffs, defendants, and the public in the courtroom is a crucial arena for shaping social meanings about law and justice. In several observed cases, when judges demonstrated empathy and listened attentively to citizens' complaints, public trust in the law increased significantly, even when the outcome of their decisions was not entirely favorable to the citizens. Conversely, rigid, formalistic, and elitist communication tended to widen the gap between the court and the public. Therefore, social interaction in the judiciary is a determining factor in the moral legitimacy of the law: the more humane the interaction, the greater the public's acceptance of the justice being upheld.

Transparency in the trial process and empathy demonstrated by judges are important symbols of legal morality. In interviews with members of the public who have litigated at the Surabaya State Administrative Court, many felt that justice was felt when judges explained the reasons for their decisions in clear, easy-to-understand language. Conversely, the use of technical and exclusive legal terms is often perceived as a frightening symbol of power. Simple actions such as allowing additional time to hear testimony or using non-judgmental language are concrete representations of the legal moral values that are alive in the eyes of the public.

The legal language and symbols used by judges in court have symbolic power in shaping perceptions of justice. The judge's manner of speaking, tone of voice, gestures, and even the manner in which he reads the verdict all convey a moral message that is perceived by the public. In the context of the State Administrative Court (PTUN), humanistic language can restore public trust in the law, while cold and bureaucratic language actually reinforces the image of law as an instrument of power. Therefore, symbolic interaction in the courtroom cannot be viewed as merely technical, but as an integral part of the construction of legal social legitimacy.

True justice is not only what is declared (justice declared), but also what is felt (justice experienced). Field observations have shown that people who feel respected during the trial process tend to accept the verdict, even if they are formally declared the loser. Statements such as "we lost, but we feel heard" indicate that substantive justice has been achieved at the level of social experience, though not normatively. This confirms the thesis of symbolic interaction theory that legal meaning is not formed from texts, but from social interactions that affirm a sense of humanity.

The social legitimacy of law emerges when society interprets the law as a protective means of justice, not an oppressive instrument of power. In the practice of the State Administrative Court (PTUN), this legitimacy is built through transparent communication, recognition of citizens' rights, and humane treatment during the legal process. When judges demonstrate that the law is not blind to social realities, society responds with respect and trust.

Therefore, the process of legal communication becomes a key factor in determining whether the law is viewed as a moral authority or merely an authority of power.

From the overall analysis, it can be concluded that substantive justice and social legitimacy in PTUN decisions are formed not only through the content of the decision, but also through the social interactions that surround it. Open communication processes, humanistic legal symbols, and respect for the parties in the case create a vibrant sense of justice in society. Thus, symbolic interaction theory asserts that the judiciary functions not only as an arena for law enforcement but also as a moral space where human values are practiced. When law is experienced as a dignified social experience, justice is no longer merely decided but truly felt and believed.

Within the framework of Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, legal practice is understood as the result of a dialectic between structure (rules, norms, institutions) and agency (individual reflective action). In the context of the Surabaya Administrative Court, the administrative legal structure is characterized by formal, rational, and procedural characteristics. However, judges are not merely mechanical implementers of this structure but also reflective agents who interpret and reproduce the law based on the social context. Judges exist in a negotiating space between the legal certainty demanded by the system and the perceived need for justice in society. With this reflective capacity, judges are able to bridge the gap between written law and living law.

From the overall analysis, it can be concluded that substantive justice and social legitimacy will only be achieved if judges play an active role as moral agents in the legal system. The law must be interpreted with a conscience of social justice, local and social values are recognized as sources of legal morality, social interactions in court reflect respect for humanity, and judges become guardians of the balance between legal certainty and justice that exist in society. Thus, judges at the Surabaya PTUN are not only implementers of the rules, but also shapers of the social meaning of law, ensuring that the law does not stop at the text, but lives as a moral force that upholds human dignity.

4.3. Existing Model

The social construction of law in the Surabaya Administrative Court's ruling illustrates the intersection between formal legal norms and the social realities that exist within society. In this context, judges function not merely as enforcers of legal texts but also as interpreters of values of justice derived from social experience and public morality. The decision-making process becomes a dialectical arena between legal certainty and the sense of social justice desired by society, so that law does not stop at procedure but rather lives as a socially meaningful value.

In a land dispute case at the Surabaya Administrative Court, judges interpret the law not only through positive regulations but also by considering moral and humanitarian aspects. The assessment of justice cannot be separated from the social context of citizens affected by state administrative decisions. Therefore, moral discretion is used to bridge the gap between legal texts and human reality, making administrative law a means of restoring rights and strengthening citizens' dignity.

The meaning of PTUN decisions is not singular. Judges, plaintiffs, defendants, and the public have different perspectives on the meaning of justice. For judges, justice is measured through consistency with legal norms and the principle of legality; while for the public, justice is measured by a sense of being respected, heard, and treated humanely. These differences in interpretation emphasize that substantive justice is the result of symbolic communication in the courtroom that reflects the social experiences of the parties.

The law, the judge's demeanor, and trial procedures shape public perceptions of justice. When judges are empathetic and communicative, the public perceives the law as moral and humane. Conversely, when the law appears rigid and elitist, its social legitimacy is weakened. Therefore, substantive justice is not only built through legal argumentation, but also through communication that respects human dignity.

In practice, the Surabaya Administrative Court (PTUN) faces the reality of social inequality between citizens and the government. The government, as the defendant, possesses stronger legal and political resources than citizens, as the plaintiff. This inequality has the potential to create structural bias in access to administrative justice. Therefore, judges need to be reflective and sensitive to social conditions to ensure that the law truly functions as an instrument of protection, not simply a means of legitimizing power.

One of the important findings of this study is the clash of values between rational and procedural modern administrative law and the socio-cultural values of society based on harmony, mutual cooperation, and humanity. Modern law emphasizes efficiency and certainty, while local values emphasize social balance and solidarity. This

tension forces judges to navigate a plurality of values to ensure their decisions do not lose social legitimacy in the eyes of the community.

In the context of legal pluralism, the effectiveness of state law depends on its ability to interact with the social values prevalent in society. Judges in the State Administrative Court (PTUN) play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the formal legal system and the living law of society. By interpreting the law pluralistically and contextually, judges are able to deliver decisions that are not only legally valid but also socially and morally acceptable. This approach revitalizes the essence of substantive justice amidst rigid administrative procedures.

Substantive justice is the primary measure of a decision's social legitimacy. Society judges justice not by formal legality, but by the law's ability to provide empathy, protection, and social balance. In PTUN practice, an open, transparent, and humane trial process is a crucial factor in determining public acceptance of a decision. Social legitimacy of the law arises when the public perceives that the law truly favors the common good, not power.

Within the framework of structuration theory, judges are not only subject to a hierarchical legal structure but also act as moral agents who revitalize the law in accordance with the needs of social justice. Through reflective interpretation and ethical discretion, judges can correct systemic inequalities and direct the law toward its moral goals. Judges thus serve as guardians of the balance between the rule of law and the rule of justice, ensuring that the law does not lose its human value amidst bureaucratic rationality.

The social construction and interpretation of law in the Surabaya Administrative Court's ruling affirms that just administrative law is inclusive, reflective, and rooted in societal morality. Judges act as a balance between state power and citizen rights, interpreting the law contextually and humanistically by integrating humanitarian, socio-cultural, and public moral values into positive law. This is where substantive justice and the social legitimacy of law take shape: not as a dead text, but as a living moral practice within society.

Table 1. Existing Model

No	Formulation of the problem	Research Focus	Findings	Minor Proposition	Mayor Proposition
1.	How is the construction of the social meaning of law formed and reflected in the process of resolving land disputes related to state administrative decisions at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) in case No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY?	The Social and Legal Meaning of the Decision of the Surabaya State Administrative Court Social Construction of Law in PTUN Decisions Interpretation of Decisions by Legal Actors and Society	Social Construction of Law in PTUN Decisions Social meaning is formed through a dialectical process between positive legal norms and the social reality of society. The social construction of law at the Surabaya PTUN is built through the integration of formal, moral and social values. Judges interpret the law not only based on procedural norms, but also on considerations of humanity, social justice, and public welfare. The decision represents an effort to balance the rule of law and a sense of justice, reflecting a response to social reality and the inequality between citizens and the state. Interpretation of Decisions by Legal Actors and Society The interpretation of PTUN decisions by legal actors (judges, plaintiffs, defendants,	Substantive justice arises when administrative law is used as a means of restoring rights and strengthening public morals amidst social inequality. Legal legitimacy grows when the judicial process is experienced as a space of empathy, not just a formal procedure..	“The social construction and interpretation of law in the Surabaya PTUN decision emphasizes the role of judges as a balance between state power and citizen rights, who interpret the law contextually and humanistically by integrating humanitarian, socio-cultural, and public moral values into positive law to realize substantive justice and social legitimacy.”

No	Formulation of the problem	Research Focus	Findings	Minor Proposition	Mayor Proposition
			<p>advocates) and the public is not singular.</p> <p>Judges interpret it as a form of legal certainty and moral justice; society interprets it as a symbol of recognition of human values and social rights.</p> <p>Interactions in the courtroom become a symbolic arena for the formation of the meaning of justice, where the feeling of being valued, heard, and treated fairly becomes a benchmark for the social legitimacy of law.</p>		
2.	What social, cultural, political, and legal factors influence the judge's considerations in deciding land dispute cases related to state administrative decisions at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) in case No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY?	<p>Social, Cultural, Political, and Legal Factors Influencing Judges' Considerations</p> <p>Social Inequality and Access to Administrative Justice</p> <p>The Conflict between Modern Administrative Law and Local Values</p> <p>Substantive Justice and Social Legitimacy in PTUN Decisions</p>	<p>Social Inequality and Access to Administrative Justice</p> <p>Social inequality between citizens and the government creates an imbalance in access to administrative justice.</p> <p>Judges face a dilemma between legal certainty and social sensitivity.</p> <p>In practice, substantive justice is realized through the use of moral discretion to protect vulnerable groups.</p> <p>The Conflict between Modern Administrative Law and Local Values</p> <p>A clash of values occurs between the formalistic modern administrative legal system and the social values of society, which are based on harmony, morality, and humanity. Judges must navigate this plurality of values to ensure that their decisions do not lose social legitimacy. Recognition of local values strengthens the community's sense of justice.</p> <p>Judges must navigate a plurality of values so that their decisions do not lose social legitimacy.</p> <p>Recognition of local values strengthens people's sense of justice.</p> <p>Substantive Justice and Social Legitimacy in PTUN Decisions</p>	<p>Socially oriented administrative justice demands that judges be sensitive to inequality and able to interpret the law progressively.</p> <p>Respect for local social and customary values can strengthen legal legitimacy and foster public trust in the judiciary.</p> <p>Social legitimacy of law arises when decisions reflect substantive justice and the community's sense of humanity.</p>	

No	Formulation of the problem	Research Focus	Findings	Minor Proposition	Mayor Proposition
			Judges interpret the law not only based on formal legal norms, but also through public morals and human values. Substantive justice is a measure of the social legitimacy of a decision. A transparent, empathetic, and humane trial process strengthens public acceptance of the law.		

Source: Data by Researchers, 2025.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Conclusion

1) The Social and Legal Meaning of the Decision of the Surabaya State Administrative Court

This study shows that the construction of the social meaning of law in the decisions of the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) is formed through a dialectical process between positive legal norms and social values that exist in society. The decision not only represents the formal application of administrative law, but also reflects the moral and social response to the unequal relationship between citizens and the government. In case No. 33/G/2025/PTUN.SBY, the judge attempted to balance the rule of law and a sense of justice, indicating that law in practice cannot be separated from the social context that surrounds it. Thus, the social construction of law in the Surabaya PTUN functions as an integrative means between formal legality and social justice that favors the interests of humanity.

In this context, judges play a role not only as law enforcers but also as moral agents who interpret the law contextually. Through reflective discretion, judges deliver substantive justice by considering the public interest and protecting the socially and structurally vulnerable. PTUN decisions are not based on dry legal logic, but are animated by an ethical awareness that law should be an instrument for the restoration of rights, not the legitimacy of power. Thus, substantive justice in the Surabaya PTUN decisions is rooted in the judges' ability to integrate positive law with public moral values and universal humanitarian principles.

The interpretation of decisions by legal actors and society demonstrates that justice is understood in a multi-layered, non-uniform manner. For judges and lawyers, justice is rooted in legal rationality and the certainty of norms; while for society, justice is measured by the feeling of being respected, heard, and treated with empathy throughout the legal process. The interaction process in the courtroom becomes a symbolic arena where law acquires its social meaning. When judges demonstrate an open, communicative, and humanistic attitude, the social legitimacy of decisions increases. Conversely, if the law appears rigid and exclusive, society tends to view it as far from just. Therefore, the communicative dimension of the judicial process is the foundation for building public trust in state law.

The findings of this study confirm that the social meaning of law in PTUN decisions is not only generated through normative construction, but also through social experience and symbolic interactions among legal actors. Decisions become a means of articulating the values of social justice that exist in society, where law is interpreted not merely as a regulatory system, but as a moral reflection oriented towards the common good. Thus, effective administrative law is not merely one that complies with procedures, but one that possesses moral and social legitimacy because it is able to respond to the public's sense of justice in a concrete manner.

Overall, this study concludes that the social construction and interpretation of law in the Surabaya Administrative Court's rulings form a new, more humanistic paradigm for law enforcement. The integration of positive law, humanitarian values, and social experience creates a balance between legal certainty and substantive justice. Judges emerge as a balance between state power and citizen rights, interpreting the law pluralistically and contextually. Through this process, justice is no longer understood as a formal product of legal texts, but rather as

the result of a vibrant social and moral dialogue—a form of justice that is meaningful to society and strengthens the social legitimacy of state administrative justice.

2) Social, Cultural, Political, and Legal Factors Influencing Judges' Considerations

This research reveals that judges' considerations in land disputes at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) are shaped not only by formal legal structures, but also by the surrounding social, cultural, political, and moral dynamics. Judges cannot operate mechanically under the procedural pressures of rigid administrative law, but must act reflectively in the face of the complexity of values and social realities. Therefore, every decision is essentially the result of a dialectic between modern legal structures and the need for substantive justice that exists within society.

In the social dimension, inequality between citizens and the government is the most dominant factor affecting access to administrative justice. The government, with greater legitimacy and legal resources, often holds a stronger position in court proceedings. However, judges at the State Administrative Court (PTUN) strive to deliver substantive justice through moral discretion, namely by expanding the scope of legal interpretation to protect vulnerable groups. This approach demonstrates that social sensitivity and empathy are crucial instruments in upholding administrative justice that is more oriented toward humanity than mere formal certainty.

In addition to social inequality, this study also found that cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping judicial reasoning. There is a clear clash between the logic of modern administrative law, which emphasizes procedures, efficiency, and formal rationality, and the local values of Indonesian society, which prioritize harmony, the common good, and social morality. In this context, judges have a central role in navigating the plurality of values to ensure their decisions do not lose social legitimacy. Recognition of customary values and social norms is key to maintaining the law's relevance and acceptance by society as a living instrument of justice.

The pluralistic approach adopted by judges marks a significant transformation in the practice of state administrative justice in Indonesia. Judges at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) interpret the law not rigidly, but rather by considering the social and cultural context of the community in which the dispute arose. This approach demonstrates the judges' moral courage to make local and humanitarian values an integral part of the interpretation of positive law. Thus, the judiciary not only performs a formal legal function but also acts as a social mechanism that bridges the gap between state and societal values.

On a broader level, substantive justice and social legitimacy are two complementary dimensions in the Surabaya Administrative Court's decision. Substantive justice does not stop at the legal text, but is realized through an empathetic, transparent, and humane process in the courtroom. Social legitimacy of law arises when society views the law as a reflection of public morality, not as an instrument of power. When judges display an open, communicative attitude and respect for the dignity of the parties, society perceives that state law is no longer distant from their lives.

Thus, the role of judges is no longer limited to law enforcers, but rather to moral and social agents capable of bringing to life the values of justice embedded in the text of the law. Judges serve as a balance between state power and citizen rights, ensuring that the law serves not only to uphold order but also to protect humanity. Through progressive and socially sensitive interpretations, judges transform the judicial space into an arena for moral reflection, strengthening the social legitimacy of law in the eyes of society.

Four primary factors influencing judges' deliberations in administrative cases at the State Administrative Court (PTUN) form an interconnected analytical framework encompassing social, cultural, political, and legal factors. Social factors encompass societal conditions and structures, such as social inequality, access to administrative justice, public perception, and social solidarity, all of which influence how judges interpret the social impact of a decision. Cultural factors encompass local values, community legal culture, local wisdom, and judges' understanding of living law, so that decisions are based not only on legal texts but also on the cultural context in which the dispute takes place. Political factors relate to the power relations between the judiciary and the executive branch, the potential for political pressure, the credibility and neutrality of judges, and bureaucratic patterns that can influence the independence of decision-making. Meanwhile, legal factors encompass national legal structures, discretionary authority, principles of substantive justice, and the administrative legal framework governing official actions; all of which provide both boundaries and scope for interpretation for judges. These four

factors operate simultaneously, so that judges' deliberations cannot be separated from the multidimensional context that shapes their perspectives and decisions in resolving administrative disputes.

This study concludes that substantive justice and social legitimacy in the decisions of the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) are achieved when positive law is operationalized through the judge's conscience which is pluralistic, contextual, and oriented towards human values. Social, cultural, political, and legal factors interact in shaping the judge's considerations, which ultimately result in decisions that are not only legally valid, but also morally and socially just. This paradigm emphasizes that ideal administrative law is a law that is alive, inclusive, and reflective of the justice needs of the legal community that does not merely speak about the state, but also about humans and their humanity.

5.2. Research Implications

1) Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this research makes an important contribution to enriching the concepts of legal consciousness and the social construction of law in the context of administrative law in Indonesia. The findings indicate that administrative law cannot be understood solely as a normative instrument governing the relationship between citizens and the state, but also as a social product continuously shaped by interactions between legal actors, cultural values, and power structures. This perspective reinforces the view that law is not an entity that stands outside of society, but rather a reflection of social consciousness that is alive in judicial practice. Thus, this research broadens the horizon of administrative law theory toward a sociological paradigm that is more sensitive to social dynamics, public morality, and substantive justice. This challenges the positivistic paradigm that has dominated state legal practice by emphasizing that the validity of law is also determined by its social acceptance (social legitimacy).

Furthermore, the results of this study also strengthen the relevance of the theories of legal pluralism and structuration in explaining the dynamics of the role of judges as reflective agents amidst the plurality of legal values that exist in society. Within the framework of legal pluralism, judges do not simply interpret state regulations but also negotiate the meaning of justice by considering customary norms, humanitarian values, and public moral principles. This process demonstrates that administrative law in Indonesia is polycentric, where state norms, social morals, and cultural values interact and form a more inclusive legal legitimacy. On the other hand, Giddens' structuration theory emphasizes that judges act as agents of moral structuration capable of reproducing law as a consciously reflective social action. In other words, judges not only enforce the law but also reconstruct it to suit social realities and human needs.

These findings provide a new conceptual foundation for the development of administrative law theory in Indonesia, moving toward a contextual justice paradigm, namely justice that is sensitive to social, cultural, and political contexts. This approach reinforces the notion of responsive law, which emphasizes that legal legitimacy arises from its ability to adapt to social values and public aspirations. Therefore, future administrative law theory needs to integrate three main pillars: normative coherence (the law's conformity to the principles of formal legality); moral responsiveness (the law's ability to address the needs of substantive justice); and social legitimacy (the acceptance of the law by society through symbolic experience and empathetic communication). Through the integration of these three dimensions, administrative justice can be understood not merely as an instrument of the state, but as a social mechanism that maintains a balance between legal rationality and human conscience.

2) Practical Implications

Practically, this research provides important direction for reforming state administrative judicial practices to be more responsive to social realities and community needs. The finding that judges at the Surabaya State Administrative Court (PTUN) use moral, social, and humanitarian considerations in deciding cases indicates the need to strengthen judges' capacity in socio-legal reasoning, the ability to balance formal legal norms with the surrounding social context. This implication encourages the need for reform in legal education and training for judges and judicial officials, particularly by emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses aspects of legal sociology, public ethics, and legal anthropology. Thus, judges are not only required to be interpreters of texts, but also mediators of values and realities, so that each decision can be more accepted by society as a form of moral and humane justice.

In the institutional realm, the results of this study suggest that the state administrative justice system needs to develop more open and participatory mechanisms to strengthen the social legitimacy of the law. Transparent trial processes, the use of communicative legal language, and respect for the participation of the community and vulnerable groups can increase public trust in the judiciary. Furthermore, the application of the principle of substantive justice in every decision can be realized through updating technical judicial guidelines and ethical standards for judges that emphasize the dimensions of humanity and social justice. This practice not only strengthens legal morality but also serves as an effective strategy to narrow the gap between state law and the living law of society.

More broadly, the practical implications of this research also relate to national legal policy, particularly in administrative law reform oriented toward social justice. The government and the Supreme Court can use the findings of this research as a basis for developing a policy framework that prioritizes substantive justice and social legitimacy as measures of judicial performance, rather than merely speed or procedural certainty. The pluralistic and humanistic approach employed by the Surabaya State Administrative Court judges can be institutionalized in the form of judicial best practices guidelines to ensure consistent legal interpretation that is sensitive to socio-cultural contexts across all courts. Thus, the practical implications of this research not only strengthen the PTUN's role as the guardian of the legality of government actions, but also as the guardian of public justice and humanitarian morality within the Indonesian legal system.

5.3. Suggestion

1) Government (Executive and Policy Makers)

In the context of this research, the government, as the primary actor in state administration, has a moral and constitutional responsibility to ensure that every public policy is not only oriented towards formal legality but also reflects substantive justice and humanity. The government plays a role in determining the direction of policies that can strengthen or weaken the social legitimacy of law in the eyes of the public. Therefore, strengthening the values of justice as fairness, openness in the policy process, and accountability based on public morality are important foundations for building a just, participatory government system that aligns with the principles of social justice as stated in Pancasila.

- a. The government needs to strengthen the principle of justice as fairness in every administrative policy, ensuring that public decisions are not only legally valid but also socially and morally just.
- b. Administrative law reform must be directed towards participatory mechanisms, involving the public and independent institutions in evaluating policies that have a broad impact on citizens' rights.
- c. The central and regional governments need to develop a monitoring and accountability system for policies based on humanitarian values, so that every administrative action is in line with the mandate of Pancasila social justice.

2) Judicial Institutions and Judges (Judiciary)

Judicial institutions and judges play a central role in maintaining the balance between legal certainty and social justice, particularly in the context of administrative disputes involving citizens and the state. Judges serve not only as interpreters of legal texts but also as moral agents who uphold humanitarian values and substantive justice through reflective deliberation. Therefore, strengthening judicial capacity through ethics education, an understanding of legal pluralism, and the provision of proportional discretion are key to ensuring that every decision is not merely normatively legal but also socially just and morally dignified.

- a. Judicial institutions need to strengthen the capacity of judges to implement substantive justice through training on judicial ethics, legal pluralism, and social sensitivity.
- b. Judges need to be given greater judicial discretion to interpret the law according to the social context without ignoring the principle of formal legality.
- c. The Supreme Court and the Judicial Commission need to promote a system of judicial development that emphasizes moral integrity and reflective ability in delivering just decisions for the common people.

3) Academics and Legal Education Institutions

Academics and legal education institutions have a strategic responsibility to shape a new paradigm for law enforcement that is not solely text-oriented but also socially and morally contextual. In this regard, the role of

academia is crucial as a producer of legal ideas, theories, and models that are more reflective of social realities and substantive justice. By strengthening interdisciplinary curricula, research based on social justice issues, and implementing clinical legal education that directly impacts people's lives, academics can bridge the gap between legal theory and practice. Thus, legal education no longer merely produces formal legal experts, but also develops legal intellectuals who are empathetic, adaptable to value pluralism, and committed to humanitarian ethics and public justice.

- a. Law schools need to expand their educational curricula to include interdisciplinary studies, such as the sociology of law, the philosophy of justice, and the ethics of public administration.
- b. Academic research in the field of administrative law must be directed at issues of substantive justice, legal pluralism, and power relations in order to enrich the contextual basis of legal theory.
- c. Law faculties need to encourage students and lecturers to conduct clinical legal education based on real social cases so that legal learning does not stop at the normative level, but touches on the practice of social justice.

4) Public

Civil society and institutions play a crucial role as moral and social pillars in maintaining the balance between state power and citizen rights. Public participation in oversight, advocacy, and the formation of a legal culture are crucial elements in strengthening the social legitimacy of the justice system. In the context of administrative law, public legal awareness serves not only to demand rights but also as a collective effort to build transparent and equitable governance. Therefore, community empowerment, the active role of non-governmental organizations, and the formation of a legal culture based on local values and social solidarity need to be strengthened so that the law truly becomes a living and meaningful instrument of justice for the public.

- a. The public needs to increase legal awareness so that they are able to understand their administrative rights and use legal channels constructively.
- b. Non-governmental organizations can act as watchdogs against government decisions that potentially violate social justice, as well as encourage transparency in administrative processes.
- c. Legal communities and community organizations need to build a legal culture based on local values, social solidarity, and humanity, to strengthen the social legitimacy of state law.

5) Other Researchers

Future researchers have a crucial role to play in broadening the scientific horizons related to administrative justice and the dynamics of judicial deliberation within the social and cultural contexts, as well as the development of modern governance. Further research is expected to be not only descriptive, but also comparative and theoretical, enabling it to map variations in substantive justice enforcement practices across Indonesia. By considering the dynamics of legal pluralism, the digitalization of public administration, and the evolution of social morality, future research can significantly contribute to the development of a more contextual, inclusive legal theoretical model rooted in humanitarian values and public ethics.

- a. It is recommended that future research expand the object of study to state administrative courts in other regions in order to compare the patterns of judges' considerations in different social and cultural contexts.
- b. Researchers can explore more deeply the relationship between legal pluralism and social legitimacy of law in the context of digitalization of public administration.
- c. Further studies need to be directed at developing a theoretical model of administrative justice based on public morals, which can be used as a reference in updating the national legal system.

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