



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38035/dijemss.v6i6>
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Social Stratification and Inequality of Access to Public Services in the Cities of Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo: A Marxian and Weberian Conflictual Study

Silvia Eka Nur Wulandari¹, Sugeng Harianto²

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia, 24040885001@mhs.unesa.ac.id

²Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia, sugengharianto@unesa.ac.id

Corresponding Author: 24040885001@mhs.unesa.ac.id¹

Abstract: This study aims to explore in detail the structural mechanisms that reinforce inequality, focusing on the interaction between economic (class), social status (prestige) and power (authority) dimensions and analyzing how social stratification produces and reproduces inequality in access to public services in Surabaya City, Malang City and Sidoarjo Regency using a conflictual approach based on Marxian and Weberian theories. The study adopted a qualitative method with a multicluster case study design, combining in-depth interview techniques, participatory observation and documentation analysis. The research shows that inequality in access to education, health and public administration services is significantly influenced by unequal structures of social class, status and power. In the Marxian perspective, such inequality is a reflection of the dominance of the capitalist class in accessing and controlling public resources, while the Weberian approach reveals that social status and bureaucracy create systematic differentiation of opportunities. This study makes a theoretical contribution by synergizing two classic approaches in explaining the phenomenon of urban social inequality in Indonesia and filling the void in stratification studies that have tended to be descriptive. Practically, the results of this study recommend the need to reform the public service system based on the principles of distributive justice and equal access. The findings also imply that without substantial structural changes, inequality in public services will continue to reproduce the cycle of social injustice in urban spaces.

Keyword: Social Stratification, Public Service Inequality, Marx's Theory, Weber's Theory, Urban City, Social Justice

INTRODUCTION

In urban sociology studies, the issue of social stratification and inequality in access to public services has become a structural problem that continues to overshadow the development process in big cities in Indonesia, including Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo Regency. These three areas show the dynamics of rapid urbanization, economic modernization, and complex social transformation. However, instead of producing equal welfare, this development actually deepens the gap in inequality between social classes. Social stratification is not only reflected

in differences in income or asset ownership, but also in opportunities to access basic services such as education, health, housing, and public administration (Fahmi & Yuliana, 2022; Prasetyo & Wulandari, 2021). This phenomenon marks the importance of reading urban social realities critically through a theoretical perspective that emphasizes relations of power and domination, as put forward by classical thinkers such as Karl Marx and Max Weber.

In this context, this study identifies the main problem, how social stratification produces and reproduces inequality in access to public services in Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo within the framework of Marxian and Weberian conflictual analysis. This study aims to explore in detail the structural mechanisms that reinforce this inequality, focusing on the interaction between economic dimensions (class), social status (prestige), and power (authority). In addition, this study attempts to fill a theoretical gap that is still rarely touched on, studies of social stratification in Indonesia have tended to be dominated by a descriptive approach without deeply linking how class power and status produce inequality in access to public services (Utami & Sari, 2023; Rahayu & Santoso, 2021). This study offers a dialectical approach that combines Marx's materialistic structural reading with Weber's multidimensional analysis to explain contemporary stratification in the context of urban Indonesia.

Previous research has shown that although inequality in public services has been widely discussed in various studies, the focus of the studies is generally more sectoral, such as inequality in education (Fitriani & Ramadhani, 2021), health (Ramadhan & Astuti, 2023), or infrastructure (Wibowo & Astuti, 2022) without integratively linking it to the broader social stratification system. On the other hand, studies on social stratification in Indonesian cities, such as those conducted by Hidayat and Rahmawati (2021), still do not explore how this stratification is translated into concrete forms of inequality in public services. Furthermore, the theoretical approach in these studies tends to only use the concept of absolute poverty or spatial inequality, without utilizing the lens of Marxian social criticism or Weberian multidimensional complexity in reading social inequality. This is the intellectual lacuna that this study seeks to respond to, developing an analysis of social stratification not merely as a statistical phenomenon, but as a social process produced by power relations and class structures.

In line with the identification of problems and research objectives, this study is built on the hypothesis that inequality in access to public services in Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo is a logical consequence of social stratification supported by the dominance of the capitalist class (according to Marx) and the stratification of status-power (according to Weber). From a Marxian perspective, differences in access to public services are understood as part of the exploitation of the dominant class against the working class, where capital accumulation allows monopoly access to quality public service resources (Utami & Sari, 2023). Meanwhile, the Weberian approach enriches the analysis by considering how social status and power networks determine the opportunities for individuals or groups to access civil rights and state services (Kurniawan & Pratiwi, 2023). Thus, this study argues that inequality in public services cannot be understood solely from economic variables, but is the result of a complex interaction between economic capital, status capital, and power capital that work in urban social structures.

METHOD

Research Approach and Type

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study type in three urban areas, namely Surabaya City, Malang City, and Sidoarjo Regency. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the process of production and reproduction of social stratification in relation to inequality in access to public services (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through a combination of three main techniques:

a) In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants including local government officials, public service providers, and citizens from various social class backgrounds. This technique allows for the exploration of subjective views on how social stratification affects access to public services (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

b) Participatory Observation

Observations were conducted in public service facilities such as schools, health centers, and government offices, to record real dynamics that reflect inequality of access based on social class and status (Angrosino, 2007).

c) Documentation

Analysis of official documents, government reports, local statistics, and local news, as a complement to data triangulation (Bowen, 2009).

a. Sampling Technique

a) This study uses a purposive sampling technique with certain criteria: Low, middle, and high-income residents in the three cities.

b) Public officials responsible for the service sector (education, health, housing, public administration).

c) Social activists or NGOs engaged in the distribution of public services.

The number of informants is estimated at 30–40 people, adjusted to the principle of data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

a. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out in stages using thematic analysis techniques:

a) Data Transcription and Organization: All interview and observation data were transcribed verbatim and organized using qualitative software such as NVivo.

b) Coding and Categorization: An open coding process was carried out to identify themes related to the dimensions of class, status, and power in social stratification (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

c) Theoretical Analysis: The categorized data were analyzed by comparing empirical findings to the Marxian and Weberian stratification theoretical frameworks, emphasizing the relations of power, status, and capital accumulation as the main factors in the reproduction of inequality (Utami & Sari, 2023; Kurniawan & Pratiwi, 2023).

d) Data Triangulation: The validity of the findings was maintained through triangulation of sources, techniques, and theories, as suggested by Flick (2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that social stratification in Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo plays a major role in producing inequality in access to public services. This finding is consistent with the Marxian conflictual perspective that the dominant class monopolizes public resources to maintain their dominance (Utami & Sari, 2023).

a) Inequality in Access to Education Services

The results of the study show that inequality in access to education in Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo is greatly influenced by social stratification, where students from the upper social class gain superior access to quality education through the support of facilities and supporting activities that are not evenly available in public schools. Observations at public elementary schools in South Malang show that damaged laboratory facilities do not receive attention, while students from wealthy families choose to attend private institutions with better resources. This is reinforced by the statement of one Malang resident (Dw, 32 years old) as follows:

"... my child goes to a public elementary school, but if I want to take part in tutoring, I have to look for it myself outside because the school doesn't provide it" (Primary Data, April 19, 2025)

Documentation from BPS Sidoarjo (2024) also shows that low-income families tend to rely on public schools despite their minimal quality, while middle to upper-class families access elite private education. Theoretical interpretations based on the Marxian approach explain this phenomenon as a form of reproduction of educational capital controlled by the dominant class, which utilizes educational institutions to strengthen their position in the social structure (Utami & Sari, 2023). Meanwhile, from a Weberian perspective, social status plays an important role in determining a person's ability to access premium education services, where prestige and social networks strengthen the exclusivity of access (Kurniawan & Pratiwi, 2023). Personally, I see that this gap creates a cycle of intergenerational inequality that is difficult to break, because children from poor families are forced to receive lower quality education services and lose opportunities for social mobility.

a) Inequality in Access to Health Services

The inequality in health services is very real between residents with low and high economic status. Observation results at the Klojen Health Center in Malang and the Candi Health Center in Sidoarjo show that BPJS PBI patients have to wait longer than general patients. This is confirmed by the statement of the Klojen Health Center officer: "... medicine for BPJS patients is indeed limited by the formulary. For general patients, they can buy freely if they want" (Primary Data, April 19, 2025).

Observations at the Candi Health Center also recorded long queues of up to 50 people for BPJS patients, while general patients received fast service. Documentation from the Surabaya Health Office in 2023 revealed that the doctor-patient ratio was much higher in the elite areas of Central Surabaya (1:500) compared to North Surabaya (1:1800). This phenomenon can be explained by Marx's theory that health services have been commodified and can only be easily accessed by those with economic capital, so that the working class remains in a subordinate position in the public health structure (Utami & Sari, 2023). The Weberian perspective complements the analysis by highlighting the role of social status and bureaucracy that create hidden stratification in the service system (Kurniawan & Pratiwi, 2023). From a personal perspective, this inequality in health services reflects the paradoxical exclusivity of the public service system: designed for inclusion but run with a subtle logic of exclusion.

a) Inequality of Access to Public Administration

In terms of public administration services such as processing population documents, it was found that residents with low social status experienced obstacles that were not faced by residents from the upper class. Interviews with residents of North Surabaya revealed that without an "insider", processing a Family Card (KK) could take up to two months:

".... if you want to process a Family Card quickly, there must be an insider. If not, it takes a long time" (Primary Data, April 26, 2025).

Observations show that sub-district offices in Sidoarjo do not have public internet facilities or digital assistance, while offices in elite areas such as Darmo Surabaya are equipped with fast service officers and technology-based information. Documentation from BPS Sidoarjo also states that 62% of poor residents experience difficulties in online-based administration services due to limited digital literacy and device access.

Marx's theory emphasizes that the state in a capitalist structure works to serve the interests of the dominant class, including in administrative processes that appear neutral but are discriminatory in practice (Utami & Sari, 2023). From a Weberian perspective, the

administrative bureaucracy that claims to be rational actually hides status stratification, where individuals from high-prestige groups are prioritized because they are considered more "worthy" of being served (Kurniawan & Pratiwi, 2023). My personal reflection assesses that the bureaucracy at the grassroots level is still far from the principle of social equality, and institutional reform based on partisanship is an absolute requirement for realizing administrative justice.

This study shows that social stratification in urban areas such as Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo not only results in income inequality, but also deepens injustice in access to key public services: education, health, and administration. This finding is in line with the results of research by Fitriani and Ramadhani (2021) which shows that the educational gap in Surabaya is closely related to the economic status of the family, and is also in accordance with the study by Ramadhan and Astuti (2023) which highlights the inequality of health services based on social class in big cities in Indonesia. In terms of education, the results of observations of public schools show that students from low-income families experience limited educational facilities which impact their academic achievement and opportunities for social mobility. This strengthens the findings of Fahmi and Yuliana (2022) who emphasize that the inequality of educational infrastructure is one of the real forms of social stratification in urban areas. The Marxian theoretical approach used in this study effectively reveals how economic capital plays a role in reproducing structural inequality (Utami & Sari, 2023). From a personal perspective, I believe that the provision of equitable educational facilities should be the focus of public policy reform to prevent the strengthening of intergenerational inequality.

In health services, this study found that patients from the lower classes, especially BPJS PBI recipients, received different treatment in terms of access and quality of health services. This is in line with the results of the study by Gunawan and Kartika (2023) in Surabaya, which stated that patients from poor groups often experience implicit discrimination in medical services. The Weberian analysis used here, highlighting the role of social status in determining the quality of services received, greatly enriches the structural analysis (Kurniawan & Pratiwi, 2023). In my opinion, more serious efforts are needed to reform the health care system so that it is not only based on the ability to pay, but also considers the principle of social justice. In the public administration dimension, this study found that the service bureaucracy is still biased towards certain social classes, where high-status citizens get easy access to administrative services through "insiders" or premium facilities. This phenomenon confirms the findings of Lestari and Susanto (2020) regarding the injustice of public services in Sidoarjo Regency, where the poor face greater administrative barriers. Marx's theoretical approach to the state as a tool of domination of the dominant class provides a strong framework for understanding this phenomenon (Utami & Sari, 2023). From a personal perspective, I see that digitalization of services without equal distribution of digital literacy actually increases social exclusion in accessing public services.

This study has several advantages. First, the theoretical approach that combines Marxian and Weberian perspectives provides in-depth analysis of the mechanisms of reproduction of social inequality in public service spaces. Second, the use of data triangulation techniques (interviews, observations, documentation) strengthens the validity of empirical findings as suggested by Flick (2018). Third, the selection of three different urban areas (Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo) allows for comparisons that enrich the picture of inequality at the regional level. However, there are several shortcomings. First, the limited number of informants (30 - 40 people) makes the generalization of the results of this study limited to the local context only. Although the principle of data saturation has been achieved (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), further studies are needed with a wider coverage of areas and informants. Second, the main focus of this study still tends to analyze inequality from the perspective of service recipients, while the internal dynamics of public service provider institutions (such as budget pressures or internal policies) are less explored in depth. Third, this study is stronger in the

descriptive-qualitative aspect, so it has not explored policy intervention models or concrete solutions based on the findings.

In the context of developing further studies, this research can be a basis for building a critical analysis of the role of the state, market, and civil society in shaping the inequality of public services in the era of contemporary urbanization in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that social stratification contributes significantly to the reproduction of inequality in access to public services in urban areas such as Surabaya, Malang, and Sidoarjo. The main findings confirm that social class not only plays a role in determining economic capacity, but also influences accessibility to education, health, and public administration. This explanation supports Karl Marx's conflictual theoretical framework regarding the dominance of the capitalist class that monopolizes strategic resources, while being enriched by Max Weber's multidimensional approach that highlights the influence of status and power in access to services.

This study contributes to filling the theoretical gap in the study of inequality in Indonesia by offering a dialectical approach that synergizes Marxian and Weberian theories in reading urban realities. In line with the research objectives, this analysis successfully maps the structural mechanisms that reinforce social inequality in the public service system. Although the qualitative approach and data triangulation increase the validity of the findings, limitations lie in the accessibility of the study location and the minimal representation of key institutional actors.

Therefore, further studies are suggested to expand the scope of the region and examine institutional practices in more depth, including the role of the state and neoliberal policies in redesigning public services. The theoretical implications of this study affirm the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in understanding contemporary inequality structures, while practically, this research demands policy interventions that emphasize redistribution of access and justice to social services. Thus, if these unequal social relations continue to be reproduced without structural correction, then inequality will not only become a consequence, but a systemic threat to social sustainability in urban areas of Indonesia.

REFERENCE

- Anugrah, A. (2023). *Urban Inequality and Public Services in East Java: A Sociological Analysis*. *Journal of Urban Studies*, 12(1), 45-62.
- Angrosino, M. (2007). *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research*. SAGE Publications.
- Astuti, R., & Wibowo, A. (2022). Spatial Disparity and Access to Public Services: Evidence from East Java. *Indonesian Journal of Development Planning*, 6(3), 233-251.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27 - 40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). *Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis*. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fahmi, M., & Yuliana, D. (2022). Stratifikasi Sosial dan Ketidaksetaraan Akses Pendidikan di Kota Malang. *Jurnal Sosiologi Nusantara*, 8(2), 110-126.
- Fitriani, D., & Ramadhani, R. (2021). Socioeconomic Inequality in Urban Indonesia: A Case Study of Surabaya. *Journal of Social Development Studies*, 9(2), 75-90.
- Flick, U. (2018). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Gunawan, T., & Kartika, E. (2023). Stratifikasi Sosial dan Pelayanan Kesehatan di Kota Surabaya. *Jurnal Kesejahteraan Sosial Indonesia*, 11(1), 45-59.

- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Hidayat, M. A., & Rahmawati, L. (2021). Urban Inequality and Health Disparities in East Java. *Indonesian Journal of Health Policy*, 5(1), 12-26.
- Kurniawan, A., & Pratiwi, S. (2023). The Role of Social Stratification in Urban Service Inequality. *Journal of Urban and Regional Studies*, 15(1), 89-106.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Lestari, P., & Susanto, R. (2020). Ketimpangan Akses Layanan Publik di Kabupaten Sidoarjo. *Jurnal Administrasi Publik*, 7(2), 134-150.
- Maulana, R., & Putri, A. (2024). Access to Public Services in Urban and Semi-Urban Areas: A Comparative Study. *Indonesian Social Science Journal*, 10(1), 78-95.
- Prasetyo, B., & Wulandari, D. (2021). Kesenjangan Sosial di Era Urbanisasi: Studi Kasus Surabaya. *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora*, 9(3), 211-228.
- Pratama, Y., & Yuliana, S. (2022). Stratifikasi Sosial dalam Masyarakat Perkotaan. *Jurnal Sosiologi dan Antropologi Indonesia*, 8(1), 54-72.
- Putri, S. A., et al. (2022). Public Service Disparities in Java's Growing Cities. *Asian Journal of Public Affairs*, 14(2), 133-150.
- Rahayu, D., & Santoso, B. (2021). Urban Stratification and Access to Education in Indonesia. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 26(1), 17-36.
- Ramadhan, F., & Astuti, S. (2023). Ketimpangan Akses Layanan Kesehatan: Perspektif Kelas Sosial. *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat*, 10(2), 92-109.
- Ratnasari, N., & Saputra, T. (2022). Status Sosial dan Ketidakadilan Layanan Publik di Malang Raya. *Jurnal Administrasi dan Kebijakan Publik*, 5(3), 147-165.
- Sari, M., & Yusuf, R. (2020). Stratifikasi Sosial dan Urbanisasi di Jawa Timur. *Journal of Urban Research and Policy*, 7(2), 55-72.
- Setiawan, F., & Hartati, I. (2023). Inequality of Public Service Delivery in Emerging Cities. *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 9(2), 112-128.
- Sutrisno, H., & Dewi, K. (2021). Urban Poverty and Social Stratification in East Java. *Indonesian Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, 7(3), 190-208.
- Utami, L., & Sari, N. (2023). Theoretical Approaches to Inequality: Revisiting Marx and Weber. *Journal of Critical Social Theory*, 18(1), 39-56.
- Wibowo, R., & Astuti, R. (2022). Ketimpangan Akses Layanan Publik di Perkotaan. *Jurnal Pembangunan Sosial*, 8(1), 76-94.