



The Normalization of Legal Deviance: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Illegal Parking Levies in Tunjungan Romansa, Surabaya

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A B S T R A K

Revitalisasi kawasan Jalan Tunjungan menjadi “Tunjungan Romansa” telah mengubah lanskap urban Surabaya secara signifikan, namun transformasi ini tetap dibayangi oleh normalisasi sistemik praktik pungutan liar (pungli) parkir. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis fenomena tersebut melalui lensa sosiologi hukum, dengan fokus pada identifikasi disparitas antara law in books (hukum tertulis) dan law in action (hukum dalam praktik). Menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan studi kasus, penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa normalisasi terjadi melalui mekanisme “kepatuhan semu” (*pseudo-compliance*), di mana pengunjung memprioritaskan kenyamanan sosial dan estetika digital di atas integritas hukum. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa struktur kekuasaan informal yang berakar kuat pada dinamika politik lokal secara efektif menantang kedaulatan negara di ruang publik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa tanpa adanya transformasi mendasar dalam budaya hukum dan penegakan aturan yang konsisten, modernisasi ruang publik hanya akan menjadi fasad rapuh bagi hegemoni kekuatan informal yang telah mengakar.

Abstract

The revitalization of Tunjungan Street into “Tunjungan Romansa” has significantly altered the socio-economic landscape of Surabaya’s city center. However, this transformation is marred by the persistent issue of illegal levies (pungli) disguised as unauthorized parking. This study aims to analyze this phenomenon through a socio-legal lens, focusing on how legal violations undergo a process of “normalization” within urban community culture. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach, data were gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews with various field actors. The findings indicate that the normalization of pungli occurs due to a sharp disparity between law in books and law in action, influenced by informal power relations and economic pragmatism. This practice persists not due to legal ignorance, but because of a pseudo-agreement formed between field actors and visitors for the sake of accessibility and convenience. These results suggest that formal law enforcement in urban public spaces is often overshadowed by local political dialectics and a permissive legal culture. The study recommends integrating digital monitoring systems and strengthening public legal literacy to erode the culture of normalizing such violations.

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1. Introduction

Tunjungan Street in Surabaya is more than just a transportation artery; it is a historical heart and a symbol of urban identity spanning various eras. Its latest transformation into “Tunjungan Romansa” has successfully rebranded the area as an iconic lifestyle destination, where the city government

strives to create inclusive public spaces through visual aesthetics and modern governance. However, behind the glamour of artistic lights and street performances, lies a contradictory social reality: the practice of illegal levies disguised as unauthorized parking. This issue emerges as a serious challenge to law enforcement in public spaces, reflecting a wide gap between the vision of a “Smart City” and the reality of social behavior on the ground.

This phenomenon is particularly crucial when analyzed through the perspective of Agus Machfud Fauzi regarding the dynamics of local politics and power in East Java. In the context of Surabaya, public space often becomes a fierce arena of contestation between formal government authority and informal power networks with strong roots at the grassroots level. The practice of pungli in Tunjungan cannot be viewed merely as an isolated criminal act, but rather as a form of persistence by informal forces cleverly “hitching a ride” on the narrative of the city’s tourism success. This aligns with Fauzi’s thesis that local political structures must often engage in invisible negotiations with informal groups to maintain social stability, which ultimately leads to a softening or even a total weakening of absolute law enforcement.

The urgency of this research is further underscored by field facts showing that digital parking efforts have not fully mitigated deep-rooted pungli practices. Based on public complaint data gathered from various digital channels throughout 2025 and early 2026, Tunjungan Street consistently ranks at the top for complaints regarding “unreasonable parking rates.” Preliminary data shows a massive tariff disparity, where informal parking attendants openly charge between Rp 5,000 and Rp 10,000 for two-wheeled vehicles during peak hours. This figure is a 300% surge from the official rate of Rp 2,000 set by Surabaya City Regional Regulation No. 3 of 2018. The collection of money without official receipts is a blatant violation occurring amidst strict supervision and surveillance cameras.

From a socio-legal perspective, this phenomenon indicates a dangerous chasm between law in books and law in action. Pungli in Tunjungan has undergone a process of normalization, where legal violations are committed repeatedly, systematically, and eventually accepted as a collective norm by visitors. Tourists tend to choose a form of “pseudo-compliance” to avoid physical or verbal conflict with attendants, while on the other hand, authorities often fall into patterns of structured omission due to the complexity of field social relations. This condition not only erodes the authority of formal law but also strengthens urban vigilantism wrapped in modern tourism packaging.

2. Research Methods

The approach used in this study is qualitative descriptive with a social constructivism paradigm. This method was chosen to deeply understand the normalization of illegal levies involving complex interactions between actors, policies, and urban public space. As emphasized in studies within Southern Sociological Studies, a qualitative approach allows researchers to capture sociological nuances often missed by statistics, particularly in dissecting informal power relations in developing countries with unique legal transitions. Through this lens, pungli is seen not just as an administrative violation, but as a social construction born from the dialectic between the subsistence economic needs of local residents and the weak control of the state at the micro-social level.

The research location was purposively set in the Tunjungan Romansa area, Surabaya. The research was conducted through participant observation, where the researcher directly immersed themselves to observe transactional interactions. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants selected using snowball sampling, including visitors, parking service providers, and local community figures. Furthermore, to meet the criteria of The Journal of Society and Media, this study also utilized secondary data from social media to map the collective perception of the pungli issue. Data analysis followed an interactive model, from data reduction to drawing conclusions sharpened by Lawrence Friedman’s Legal Culture theory.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Typology and Mechanisms of Illegal Levies in the Tunjungan Ecosystem

Illegal parking levies in Tunjungan do not occur randomly; they are the result of a highly organized spatial adaptation. Physically, the typology of pungli here is divided into zones of influence covering primary side streets, hidden sidewalks, and the unauthorized occupation of private vacant lots by informal groups. The operational mechanism is very neat, where each actor has a specific role, ranging from traffic directors and fee collectors to situational monitors who detect the presence of official authorities. This phenomenon proves that pungli in Tunjungan is not just a sporadic individual act, but a form of an informal economic enterprise utilizing tourism surges to create private profit without contributing to regional revenue.

More deeply, the working method of these actors involves symbolic manipulation to create an impression of legal authority. They often use attributes resembling official uniforms, such as bright vests or whistles, to lower visitor suspicion. The absence of official receipts is frequently compensated with a “security guarantee” spoken persuasively yet containing subtle intimidatory undertones. At this point, the parking transaction transforms into a form of security tribute where visitors pay not for legally regulated parking services, but for “peace of mind” so their vehicles do not receive harsh treatment or damage while left on the roadside.

This exploitation of public space also includes the utilization of narrow alleys around Tunjungan that should function as evacuation routes. Informal actors “privatize” state-owned space by determining tariffs unilaterally that far exceed the official market standards. This tariff determination is often discriminatory, where visitors with luxury vehicles or those appearing as out-of-town tourists are charged much higher fees. This price uncertainty creates a climate of public discomfort, but due to the limited parking alternatives provided by the city government, visitors are trapped in a weak bargaining position and forced to submit to the rules imposed by these “sidewalk rulers.”

The relationship between fellow illegal actors in this area is also interesting to dissect as a form of deviant mechanical solidarity. There is a very strict division of territory, where each group guards its boundaries to avoid internal conflicts that could attract excessive public or official attention. This strong coordination allows them to mobilize quickly during raids, where information about crackdowns often leaks early through informal communication networks. This solidarity builds a social barricade that is very difficult to penetrate by top-down spatial planning policies, as they feel a historical right to the land long before Tunjungan was revitalized.

Ultimately, pungli in Tunjungan creates a misleading simulacrum of order. On the surface, the area looks organized with rows of vehicles, but behind it lies a massive flow of illegal money that is never touched by official tax instruments. This mechanism revolves 24 hours a day, adjusting to peak tourist hours, and slowly erodes public trust in the state’s ability to manage public space. Without action touching the roots of this informal organization, all efforts at digital parking will only be administrative narratives that fail to stop economic leakage at the grassroots level, because informal forces have already won the contest for spatial control in the field.

3.2. Commodification of Aesthetics and the Role of Media

The transformation of Tunjungan into an iconic digital aesthetic has deep sociological implications for how society views law-breaking. According to *The Journal of Society and Media*, visibility often overpowers the substance of legality. Tunjungan Romansa, promoted as an “Instagrammable” public space, has directed mass focus toward image consumption rather than adherence to social rules. Visitors come with the primary motivation of producing visual content and thus have a high tolerance for pungli, provided their content-taking process is not technically

disrupted. This visual pleasure acts as a social anesthetic that numbs the visitor's critical sense regarding the tariff injustice they face.

Social media acts as a catalyst accelerating the normalization of violations through the spread of pragmatic behavior norms. When thousands of photos of Tunjungan never mention the dark side of illegal parking, a collective perception is formed that pungli is a reasonable "entrance fee" for an urban tourism experience. A dissociation occurs between the beautiful digital reality and the corrupt social reality in the field. Surabaya's digital community prioritizes the narrative of a modern, beautiful city over questioning the existence of small-scale vigilantism behind heritage buildings.

A further impact of this aesthetic commodification is the emergence of "conspicuous consumption," where paying high parking rates is seen as part of the prestige of visiting a viral spot. Illegal actors cleverly exploit this mass psychology by setting irrational rates that are still paid by visitors to maintain social standing. There is a silent agreement between informal parking providers and visitors who want their presence in a prestigious public space recognized. Here, formal legal values are soundly defeated by social status values constructed through social media interactions.

This research also highlights how digital platforms often become spaces of legitimacy for pungli through netizen comments that are resigned or trivializing. In comment sections, narratives equating pungli with "tips" or "security money" common in big cities are frequent. This reveals a shift in legal culture from active-critical to passive-permissive. Social media is no longer an effective social control space against pungli, but rather a space where public helplessness against urban vigilantism is continuously confirmed through narratives of collective tolerance.

In conclusion, the synergy between Tunjungan's physical beauty and digital virality has created a fertile ecosystem for illegal levies. Public space, which should belong fairly to everyone, has transformed into a dark transaction space hiding behind the glamour of decorative lights. The Journal of Society and Media provides a framework that in the information age, legal truth is often defeated by mass-produced visual beauty. As long as the narrative of Tunjungan only revolves around architecture and culinary beauty without touching its dark governance side, the normalization of pungli will continue.

3.3. Disparity of Regulation and Reality

In dissecting the gap between parking regulations and field reality in Surabaya, Southern Sociological Studies offers deep insights into institutional failure in Global South countries. Here, formal law is often viewed as a rigid import unable to respond to the informal economic dynamics that are the lifeblood of the lower class. Tunjungan Romansa is a stage where the state's rational-legal law tries to be applied absolutely but must face the "law of survival" practiced by local residents losing economic access. This creates fragmented legal spaces where, on paper, the area obeys bureaucracy, but in the field, it is governed by informal norms.

The failure of law enforcement in Tunjungan reflects the state's weakness in providing inclusive public infrastructure. When the government builds a luxury tourism area without maturely thinking about cheap, integrated parking, they are essentially providing an open invitation for the informal sector to take control. In Southern sociological studies, this is seen as a form of creative yet exploitative resistance from marginal communities against urban spatial planning considered exclusive. Illegal attendants see the gap where the state is absent and step in to provide solutions, albeit at a price that robs public rights.

This normalization can also be understood through "organized informality" common in developing world cities. Pungli in Tunjungan is not just administrative chaos, but an alternative governance system running parallel to the official one. Society is often more obedient to illegal attendants not because they don't know the law, but because those attendants provide service

certainty (vehicle guarding) that the official system, with minimal personnel, often cannot guarantee. This creates a pathological dependency. The state is seen as only able to make rules without solutions, while informal groups provide solutions by ignoring rules.

Furthermore, this disparity worsens social inequality where public space, which should be economically neutral, becomes a field of extortion for low-income citizens. Visitors from lower-middle classes using two-wheeled vehicles are the main targets of pungli because they lack access to more expensive but secure building parking. Here lies the sociological irony: a public policy intended to make citizens happy through cheap tourism becomes an additional financial burden. Southern sociological perspectives emphasize that without synchronization between technocratic policy and street-level economic reality, the law is merely a political lure without real social power.

Ultimately, the normalization of pungli in Tunjungan reflects the challenges Surabaya faces in realizing its "Smart City" image. A city's intelligence is measured by the extent to which legal integrity is upheld in every corner. This regulation disparity is a warning that physical progress not accompanied by the strengthening of legal culture will only produce a pseudo-modernity. Tunjungan Romansa should be a turning point for Surabaya to prove that public space can be managed professionally without the interference of informal forces that harm the public interest.

3.4. Local Politics and Power Relations

A study of pungli in Tunjungan would lack depth without involving the analysis of deep-seated local power relations. Quoting Agus Machfud Fauzi, power dynamics in East Java are often colored by invisible collaborations between formal policymakers and informal interest groups with strong grassroots bases. In Tunjungan, the existence of illegal attendants is an extension of local power structures operating in the "gray area" between legality and illegality. These groups often have strong social legitimacy because they are seen as representing local residents "guarding the neighborhood" from outside influence.

According to Fauzi, in local political sociology, there is "accommodation politics" where local governments are forced to share space with informal forces to maintain social harmony. Law enforcement against pungli in Tunjungan is often hampered by non-legal considerations, such as the potential for mass resistance or security upheavals that could disrupt Surabaya's tourism image. Informal actors realize their strong bargaining position as field stability guardians, so they feel free to run their own rules without fear of regional regulation sanctions.

Normalization occurs due to structured omission from authorities. In Fauzi's lens, this omission is not just administrative negligence, but a political instrument to maintain support from strategic groups at the bottom. Illegal attendants in Tunjungan often have good communication networks with officials, allowing them to operate safely despite public scrutiny. The practice of informal "tributes" from pungli results to various parties is an open secret strengthening this normalization chain. When the law can be compromised for group economic and political interests, the general public has no choice but to submit to that hegemony.

This analysis also reveals the use of local symbols and certain mass organizations to strengthen the bargaining position of pungli actors. They use identities as "sons of the region" or "territory guardians" to build moral legitimacy for their illegal acts. Tunjungan visitors, mostly urban middle-class citizens who do not want to engage in horizontal conflict, tend to yield to these informal forces. This is the success of normalization: when a violation is wrapped in the narrative of supporting the economy of the "little people," legal criticism becomes blunt.

Ultimately, the pungli issue in Tunjungan is a test of state legal sovereignty at the local level. This normalization proves that amidst modern development, strong pockets of political vigilantism still dictate the rules. The power relations between field actors, local figures, and officials create a fortress

difficult to penetrate by normative public policy. Without the political courage to break this informal power chain, Tunjungan Romansa will only be proof that formal law in Indonesia often loses to the dialectic of power at the sidewalk level.

3.5. Legal Culture and Normalization

The success of normalizing pungli in Tunjungan is also heavily influenced by a permissive legal culture that avoids direct conflict. According to the Journal of Religion, Local Politics and Law, there is a close link between local socio-religious values and how people respond to injustice. Surabaya society, known for its open “Arek” spirit, turns out to have a strong pragmatism in facing small legal violations considered common. A “dark compromise” culture exists where people prioritize social harmony and the smoothness of personal affairs over enforcing normative justice.

This normalization strengthens because of distorted understandings of justice in local politics. Some people think letting pungli happen is a form of tolerance for local residents seeking a livelihood amidst the difficulty of formal jobs. This view is often linked to the narrative of “sharing fortune,” which is unfortunately applied in the wrong context: violating state rules. Studies in the journal show that when local or religious values are misused to legitimize small-scale corrupt practices, formal law loses its sanctity. Breaking the law is no longer seen as a social sin or legal error, but as a life necessity to be accepted with grace.

The “Pseudo-Compliance” phenomenon found in Tunjungan shows that people are actually aware of the violations, but choose not to act because they feel they lack systemic support from the state. Visitors feel that reporting pungli would be a long process with no guarantee of change, or even a danger to their safety. This reflects the state’s failure to provide accessible preventive legal protection. Legal culture is eventually shaped by bitter field experiences teaching that “yielding to thugs is better than fighting over rules.”

Surabaya’s local political dynamics also play a role in shaping this apathetic legal culture. Inconsistency in crackdowns signals to the public that parking rules are merely suggestions, not absolute obligations. When the public sees officials openly committing omission, they automatically adjust their behavior to align with that field reality. In the Journal of Religion, Local Politics and Law, it is emphasized that a legal system’s integrity depends on the moral consistency of the power holders.

The final conclusion of this legal culture analysis is the need for massive social engineering to restore the dignity of the law in Tunjungan. Deep-rooted normalization cannot be eliminated only by brief socialization. Real action from the city government is needed to prove that the state has greater and fairer power than informal organizations or local thugs. Strengthening public legal literacy must be accompanied by providing transparent, secure parking infrastructure. As long as people still feel safer submitting to illegal attendants than trusting the state system, Tunjungan Romansa will remain a monument to law enforcement failure.

4. Conclusion

This research concludes that illegal parking levies in Tunjungan Romansa have reached a stage of systematic normalization within the community’s legal culture. This phenomenon is not merely an administrative failure, but the result of a dialectic between visitor accessibility needs, the economic needs of informal actors, and weak local political control. The disparity between law in books and law in action occurs because formal law lacks sufficient bargaining power to challenge the hegemony of informal forces. This normalization is reinforced by a permissive and pragmatic legal culture, where short-term convenience is prioritized over legal integrity. The Surabaya City Government needs to take radical steps beyond temporary raids. First, a total integration of a digital parking system (e-parking) is mandatory throughout the Tunjungan area, with a monitoring system involving active

citizen participation via real-time reporting apps. Second, a restructuring of informal parking attendants is necessary by involving them in legal economic empowerment schemes, so they no longer operate under exploitative informal organizations. Third, strengthening legal literacy for visitors is crucial so that society has the collective courage to reject pungli. Without synchronization between technology, bold law enforcement, and changes in public legal culture, this normalization will continue to be a black mark on the romance of Tunjungan Street.

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