Asmat Indigenous Participation in Development through Participatory Mapping: A Political-Anthropological Reflection

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the participation of the Asmat indigenous people in participatory mapping within the Pomar Sirau clan, South Papua, with a focus on power dynamics, the representation of local knowledge, and the integration of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles. Through an ethnography-based qualitative approach, the research reveals that participation is not only procedural, but also cosmological – related to the sacred relationship between humans, ancestors, and nature. The findings show: 1) Substantive participation is mediated through customary (Jew) and church structures, with full community control over the decision-making process; 2) FPIC is implemented as an epistemic sovereignty mechanism, where consent is given based on cultural considerations, not just administrative; 3) Participatory mapping It serves as a tool for decolonizing space, combining local knowledge with legal advocacy for the recognition of customary rights. The analysis, using Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, placed community participation at the level of citizen control, characterized by active involvement in the planning, implementation, and validation of maps. This study highlights the need for a development approach centered on indigenous epistemology, as well as the role of local actors and religious institutions as bridges between indigenous norms and the state.

A. INTRODUCTION

Discourse on participation in Papuan development is often operationalized through procedural tools such as socialization, public consultation, planning deliberations, or the participation of indigenous leaders as formal representations. However, various studies indicate that this participation framework often functions as a mechanism of administrative legitimacy rather than a substantive negotiation space (Rumkabu, 2022; Scott, 2018; Latupeirissa et al., 2021). Participation in the Papuan context is thus not just a matter of the presence or absence of indigenous peoples' voices, but also the way in which these voices are curated, regulated, and normalized in a format determined by the state.

The literature on participation confirms that two dimensions work in overlapping: first, the logic of "safe participation" designed to secure programs and consensus (Kothari, 2001; Li, 2007); second, the idea of deliberation as a means of distributing power through an equal argumentative process (Fung, 2006; Mansbridge, 2003; Dryzek, 2010). In the case of Papua, these dimensions are amplified: participation is articulated in the language of empowerment but implemented through instruments that centralize decision-making power in state actors. This ambiguity makes participation appear to be merely walking on the surface, failing to produce meaningful relational changes in decision structures.

In the context of South Papua, especially in the Asmat community, this pattern can be seen in various project consultation, planning, and policy mediation forums involving customary representation but in a

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format that has been pre-programmed by the state and development partners (JPIC, 2022) (UNDP Papua, 2021). Here, the problem cannot be reduced to the lack of community capacity or solely to state domination, but to the mode of participatory design that simultaneously demands inclusion and restrains the redistribution of power, so that Asmat is "present" but with the limits set by the participation architecture itself.

Indigenous participation is a multidimensional concept, encompassing not only formal involvement in development planning but also the recognition of the knowledge, values, and socio-cultural practices of these communities (Tenau, 2023; Sanduan et al., 2025). In the context of the Asmat community, participation cannot be separated from the social structure of the clan, customary hierarchies, and ritual practices that shape collective life, including the making of wood carvings and boat festivals that have social, political, and spiritual significance (Kamma, 1972; Van Baal, 2019). Therefore, the application of participation models, such as those proposed by Arnstein (1969), must be contextualized to capture the local normative dimensions typical of Asmat, including clan cooperation and the principle of reciprocity in collective activities (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2001).

In a normative framework, participation should be viewed as a right and a mechanism for empowerment. This aligns with the FPIC principle, which asserts that indigenous peoples have the right to approve or reject development projects in their territories, based on adequate information (United Nations, 2007; ILO, 1989; World Bank, 2017). Recent research indicates that when participatory mechanisms fail to respect local knowledge, it can lead to resistance, marginalization, and socio-economic injustice (Cahyo Pamungkas et al., 2022; Rumkabu, 2022). In the case of Asmat, normative participation involves active involvement in participatory mapping, consultation with indigenous leaders, and the establishment of internal forums to discuss collective interests prior to formal meetings with governments or NGOs (Adam, 2025).

Philosophically, the normative concept of participation is rooted in procedural and epistemic justice theories that emphasize inclusivity, equity, and process legitimacy (Fricker, 2007; Fraser, 2008; Young, 1990). Normative participation not only provides a voice but also ensures that the local perspectives, cultural values, and historical experiences of the Asmat people are recognized and form the basis for development decision-making (Campbell, 2016; Eriksen, 2015). The integration of local values into the framework of modern development can enhance the quality of deliberation, foster a stronger sense of belonging, and ensure social and ecological sustainability (Auri et al., 2022; Muddin & Azis, 2025). Thus, this normative approach recognizes the Asmat community as a subject of development, not just a policy recipient, while affirming the importance of the relationship between customs, the environment, and collective rights in fair and sustainable development practices (Suryawan, 2013; Tenau, 2023).

The phenomenon of indigenous peoples' participation in Papua shows significant variations, depending on the social, economic, and political context in each region. In general, indigenous peoples are often faced with power inequality with governments and investors, which affects their Ledder of participation in development (Lauwinata et al., 2024). In Merauke Regency, for example, oil palm land clearing is often carried out without adequate consultation with local communities, leading to conflicts between indigenous peoples and plantation companies. The lack of clarity in socialization procedures, the transformation of production methods, and the dominance of external actors render community participation symbolic or minimal (Lauwinata et al., 2024).

On the other hand, an example of high participation can be seen in the case of the Awyu Tribe, where the community unanimously supported the protection of their customary forests through collective action and protests at the State Administrative Court. The community's success in resolving this dispute demonstrates that effective participation is more likely to occur when the community has a strong internal organization and access to legitimate legal mechanisms (Revo Linggar Vandito, 2024). A similar phenomenon is seen in land acquisition for the development of the Sorong SEZ, where active community participation includes public consultation, site approval, and involvement in deliberations on compensation, indicating a high level of participation and awareness of collective rights (Ibal et al., 2024)

However, not all implementations went smoothly. In the management of ecotourism in Raja Empat, community participation is very low, even nil, especially among teenagers. Although village heads have decision-making authority in management, household members, interest groups, and women are only involved in the implementation and distribution of the Ladder, while activity initiation is almost non-existent (Tanati et al., 2020). This indicates fragmentation of participation due to limited access to information, dominance of local elite structures, and unclear deliberative mechanisms. A similar phenomenon can also be observed in community-based village development, where projects often focus on charitable initiatives and infrastructure development, thereby limiting the opportunity for broad participation from all community groups (Yuniarto, 2022).

In the context of Asmat, the implementation of participation can be read through traditional deliberation mechanisms, clan collective work, and cultural rituals that shape collective decisions. For example, in participatory mapping activities in Pomar Sirau, the Asmat people are actively involved in determining customary boundaries, documenting natural resources, and discussing development priorities that align with their cultural values (Adam, 2025; Tenau, 2023). This process affirms that normative participation is measured not only by attendance in formal forums but also by substantive involvement in decision-making, recognition of local knowledge, and the strengthening of collective capacity to defend indigenous rights (Adam, 2025; Tenau, 2023).

Based on the literature review, there are several research gaps that arise when comparing philosophical theoretical concepts, normative concepts, and the phenomenon of the implementation of indigenous peoples' participation in Papua. Theoretically, Arnstein's (1969) framework provides a normative tool for measuring the level of participation from manipulation to citizen control. However, this model is normative and contextual to urban planning in the West, so it has not

adequately captured the logic of indigenous peoples' local participation, including the social structure of clans, cultural rituals, and collective work that are at the heart of Asmat tribal participation (Arnstein, 1969a) This gap shows the need to adapt or reinterpret participatory theory to fit local epistemology and unique cultural practices (Kothari, 2001; Escobar, 1995).

At the normative level, the literature emphasizes the right of indigenous peoples to participate through FPIC and formal deliberative mechanisms as instruments of empowerment (United Nations, 2007; ILO, 1989; Adam, 2025). However, phenomena on the ground indicate that the implementation of participation is often partial or symbolic, as seen in the development of ecotourism in Raja Empat or top-down village infrastructure projects (Tanati et al., 2020; Yuniarto, 2022). This indicates a gap between formal norms and on-the-ground practices: although the Asmat community has the legal and political right to participate, structural realities, the dominance of external actors, and limited access to information limit their substantive involvement (Tenau, 2023; Scott, 1972).

Furthermore, research gaps also arise in terms of interactions between cultures, local values, and formal mechanisms of participation. The literature indicates that the Asmat people employ deliberative practices rooted in clan deliberation, collective work, and customary rituals, which inherently regulate decision-making and resource distribution (Tenau, 2023; Scott, 1972). However, empirical research on the application of the Arnstein model has not deeply integrated these cultural and symbolic dimensions. In other words, there is an urgent need for research that links formal normative frameworks with local socio-cultural practices, so that participation is measured not only procedurally, but also substantively, contextually, and culturally (Kothari, 2001; Escobar, 1995; Tenau, 2023). This gap opens up space for participatory ethnographic studies that combine Western theory with indigenous peoples' epistemology to formulate inclusive, equitable, and sustainable models of participation (Tenau, 2023)(Adam, 2025).

The Asmat tribe in South Papua is involved in local development through participatory mapping mechanisms. The focus of the research lies on how the Asmat people are involved in the decision-making process, both formally and through traditional socio-cultural practices such as clan deliberation, collective work, and customary rituals (Adam, 2025: Tenau, 2023), as well as how these levels of participation can be categorized based on the Arnstein (Arnstein, 1969a)) participation ladder framework. The formulation of the problem studied includes the extent to which the implementation of indigenous peoples' participation in the field is in line with normative principles and participatory theory (Kothari, 2001; Escobar, 1995), as well as factors that influence their substantive involvement in development, including relationships with external actors such as governments, NGOs, and investors (Tanati et al., 2020; Yuniarto, 2022). This research is expected to provide a more holistic understanding of indigenous participation, identifying the gap between normative theory and local practice (Tenau, 2023; Adam, 2025), as well as contributing recommendations for strengthening culturally and inclusive participatory mechanisms in the context of South Papua (Arnstein, 1969; Tenau, 2023).

Indigenous peoples' involvement in the development process is critical and should include active participation throughout the development stage. According to Chambers (1997:172), participation is "about putting people in control of their own lives and ensuring that development serves their own needs." To measure control, the 'Ledder of Participation' theory from Sherry R. Arnstein (1969:216-224) who classifies participation into three categories (Figure 1): Non-Participation i.e. manipulation and therapy - society is only used as an object of development; Ledders of Tokenism are one-sided information, consultation, and conciliation - the community is informed but has no influence in decisions; and Ledders of Citizen Power, which is partnership, devolution of power, and full control - the community has a significant influence on decisions. These three categories exist in four Ladder of community participation in development according to Cohen and Uphoff (1977:14-15), namely: a) Decision Making: The community is involved in the formulation of development policies and plans; b) Program Implementation: The community participates in the implementation of development programs or projects; c) Utilization of Results: The community enjoys and utilizes the results of development; d) Evaluation: The community is involved in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of development.

B. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an ethnographic case study design to understand in depth the dynamics of the living space of indigenous peoples in five villages of the Pomar Sirau clan (Yin, 2018:15). As a researcher directly involved in people's daily lives, I conduct participatory observation by participating in mapping activities, participating in customary deliberations, and engaging in domestic activities and daily rituals so as to allow for a richer understanding of cultural practices, social relations, and the position of communities in local power structures. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured in-depth interviews with traditional elders, indigenous women, indigenous youth, and village leaders, as well as supporting informants such as the Asmat Regional Government, and mapping assistants, with the selection of informants using purposive and snowball sampling techniques until data saturation was achieved (Boyce, Carolyn, & Neale, 2006:3). In addition, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were used to verify field findings and deepen collective views related to clan history, customary boundaries, and the dynamics of relationships with external parties. Document studies were also conducted to examine government regulations, customary archives, development reports, and relevant literature as part of the data triangulation process.

Throughout the entire research process, I reflect on my position as an accepted outsider, maintain cultural sensitivity, follow customary rules, and engage in reflective recording to minimize bias. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a process that involved data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns, cultural meanings, and power relations affecting the management and recognition of indigenous

peoples' living spaces (Novendawati, 2022).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Process of Participatory Mapping

The social structure of Asmat is composed of clan units (men) with authoritative figures of elders who gain legitimacy through ritual capacity, war history, and collective responsibility, rather than administrative positions (Kamma, 1972) Collective decisions are formed within the moral-cosmological horizon through contact with ancestral spirits and rites (*mbismbu*), while nature—swamp forests, rivers, and wood—is positioned as the ontological space in which ancestors are present (Kamma, 1972; Tenau, 2023). When external actors—governments, churches, NGOs, and corporations—come in, participation relations are mediated by the history of colonial-postcolonial power, so that development serves as a "will to fix" that reorganizes the local subject into the rationality of technocratic projects (Li, 2007; Lauwinata et al., 2024).

Arena of daily interaction, such as village meetings, customary meetings attended by NGO staff, and church sermons that insert development discourse, become microsites for power negotiations through language, patronage, gifts, and symbolic legitimacy (Laplantine, 1996) Asmat's view of development is ambivalent: for some, development means access to modern education, health, and commodities, but for others it is a threat to moral-ritual institutions and human-ancestor-nature relations (Tenau, 2023; Revo Linggar Vandito, 2024). The tension between technical benefits and symbolic damage makes participation an arena of ethical negotiation between customary logic and project logic, so the study of participation in Asmat demands ethnographic sensibility to read relational practices that cross between social structures, rites, moral legitimacy, and power relations, rather than simply assessing formal presence in deliberative forums (Li, 2007; Tenau, 2023; Scott, 1972).

a. Indigenous Peoples of the Pomar Sirau Cluster

The Pomar Sirau clan is one of the twelve Asmat clans classified based on origin, language, and cultural traditions. Before participatory mapping, this clump was known as kaenok or kaenak, which means "true human." Through the process of historical tracing, collective memory, and identity negotiation, the term was later changed to Pomar Sirau, marking the traces of the migration of ancestors from the banks of the Siret River to the Pomar River area (Hendrikus Hada, 2024:293). Administratively, this community settles in Sawa Erma District and consists of seven traditional villages: Sa, Er, Erma, Sona, Bu, Agani, and Sauti as shown in table 1 below. Social and institutional structures pivot to *Jews* as the center of ritual, political, and kinship life—in line with indigenous epistemology that places space and rite as the center of the production of meaning (Campbell, 2016; Eriksen, 2015). Demographic data show a total population of 6,441 people, with the largest concentration in Sauti Village (1,480 people) and Sa (1,269 people), while the smallest community is in Sona Village (392 people), which also reflects the direct implications for power relations in

development planning. The total number of people can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. The number of Indigenous Peoples of the Pomar Sirau Cluster

No.	Kampung	Jumlah KK	Laki-laki	Perempuan	Jml. Jiwa
1.	Sa	399	689	580	1.269
2.	Er	180	432	333	765
3.	Emma	283	321	331	652
4.	Sona	85	200	192	392
5.	Bu	346	509	517	1.026
6.	Agani	339	425	432	857
7.	Sauti	198	681	799	1.480
	Total	**1.830**	**3.257**	**3.184**	**6.441**

Development literature often places indigenous peoples—including Asmat—only as policy recipients, not as subjects with their own epistemology (Campbell, 2016; Eriksen, 2015). In fact, the Asmat value system related to ancestral spirits, ritual carvings, and reciprocal logic cannot be separated from the dynamics of collective decisions (Kamma, 1972; cf. Geertz, 1973). Therefore, the analysis of development participation using the Arnstein Ladder requires ethnocentric decontextualization and ethnographic adhesives, so that the categories of participation born from the Western political tradition can be adapted to the local epistemic field. This sensitivity is becoming increasingly important in Papua, given the history of structural marginalization and the complexity of power relations in the management of indigenous peoples' living spaces.

b. Ladder of Participation of the Asmat Indigenous Peoples of the Pomar Sirau Cluster

The participation of the Asmat indigenous people in the Pomar Sirau clan in participatory mapping activities is very complex and involves several Ladder or levels. Based on the experience during the process, these Ladders are formulated into several phases that occur both before and during the mapping process.

1. Community Awareness and Initiatives

The process of participation of the indigenous people of Pomar Sirau in participatory mapping begins with a collective awareness of threats to customary rights due to external interventions, such as the exploitation of forests and rivers by state and market actors, which is rooted in the mechanism of customary deliberation in *jew*—the social-ritual space central to the production of meaning, authority, and collective memory of Asmat (Kamma, 1972) From *the Jews*, the discourse on the threat of the living area extends to other social arenas, including ecclesiastical communities that have historically played a symbolic mediating role in social change (Li, 2007; Scott, 1972). This phenomenon is in line with Nelson's (2020) finding that collective consciousness arises when existential resources are threatened by external actors, triggering the production of resistance discourses within internal cultural spaces, while studies of collective psychology show that the perception of shared threats increases the tendency of individuals to engage in collective action (Morris et al., 2015; by Summers & Louis, 2017). In the case of Asmat, this awareness is not only

based on the perception of threats, but also on local epistemology regarding homeland relations, ancestral spirits, and the morality of preserving cosmological heritage (Campbell, 2016; Eriksen, 2015). Thus, the participation of the Pomar Sirau community is understood not only as a political act, but also as a cosmological act, namely an effort to maintain relational order between humans, ancestors, and the living landscape—a dimension that is often erased in managerial-oriented development discourse (Li, 2007).

2. Parishioners' Initiative

The second stage of participation is characterized by the initiative of local actors with moral authority — particularly parishioners and diocesan structures — who assume the role of facilitating the articulation of traditional aspirations into institutional spaces. In the context of Asmat, the church is not just a religious institution, but a social arena where customary issues find a medium of legitimacy and a channel of advocacy. Intensive meetings between the faithful, parish councils, and the diocese gave birth to collective action in the form of participatory mapping as a strategy to protect customary rights from the penetration of external projects. This finding is in line with Santosa (2022) who shows that religious community-based institutions often act as catalysts for collective participation when the political capacity of indigenous peoples is structurally limited. The role of the Church is concrete by making the church a place for participatory mapping activities as seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Indigenous Women Discussing in Church

In the same process, the involvement of the Alfons Sowada Asmat Foundation (YASA) and civil society organizations broadened the battlefield through legal and technical advocacy, especially on the issue of customary land recognition and forest protection (Arizona et al., 2019) This tactical alliance between customary institutions and CSOs is not just a form of "mentoring", but a joint practice to produce political claims that can be read by the state. The main ambition is to ensure that the rights of the indigenous people of Pomar Sirau are respected and protected within the national legal and policy framework (Emiyati et al., 2023) Thus, this stage reveals a pattern of co-production of action between local epistemology, the moral authority of the church, and the instrument of civic advocacy—an articulation of participation born not of the design of the state, but of the consolidation of the internal social power of society itself.

3. FPIC / Padiatapa Activities

The third stage demonstrates how the FPIC principles are implemented as an ethical foundation in the community's approval of the mapping program. In practice, this process is not carried out administratively—through forms or technical procedures—but through public deliberations in the *jew and Parish* forums involving representation across social elements: indigenous elders as guardians of cosmological legitimacy, indigenous women as domestic-ecological authorities, and indigenous youth as agents of mobilization of action. In these forums, information about the objectives, impacts, and consequences of mapping is presented openly and considered before collective decisions are made. The process is seen in Figure 2, which shows that the FPIC process is continuing. This aligns with the FPIC principle, which is formulated as consent that is free from coercion, given prior to the intervention, and based on adequate information (Colchester)

Figure 2. FPIC Process at the Traditional House – Jew Erma

Normatively, FPIC is understood not only as a legal procedure, but as a recognition of the right of indigenous peoples to determine the fate of their own territories (Barelli, 2012) (Ward, 2011). In the context of Pomar Sirau, FPIC serves as an arena for articulating epistemic sovereignty — the right to interpret and decide based on their own regime of knowledge and cultural values, rather than simply accepting technocratic intervention from outside. Thus, the decision to accept participatory mapping programs is not a form of compliance but a form of indigenous peoples' self-authorization of collective actions that they see as being in line with the protection of the land, the ancestral spirit, and the sustainability of the community.

4. Mapping Activities and Results

The mapping implementation phase involves collaboration between the indigenous people of Pomar Sirau Somor with the Diocese of Agats, YASA, WWF, and BRWA in three main areas of work: documentation of ancestral history and migration, identification of cultural elements inherent in the landscape—such as ritual sites, sago hamlets, and sacred river currents—as well as spatial and non-spatial mapping based on indigenous narratives; However, this collaboration does not transfer the leadership of the process to external parties as the customary structure remains the center of knowledge authority, while external actors only act as technical facilitators and advocacy.

Figure 3. Map of the inner and outer boundaries of the customary territory of the Pomar Sirau Rumpun
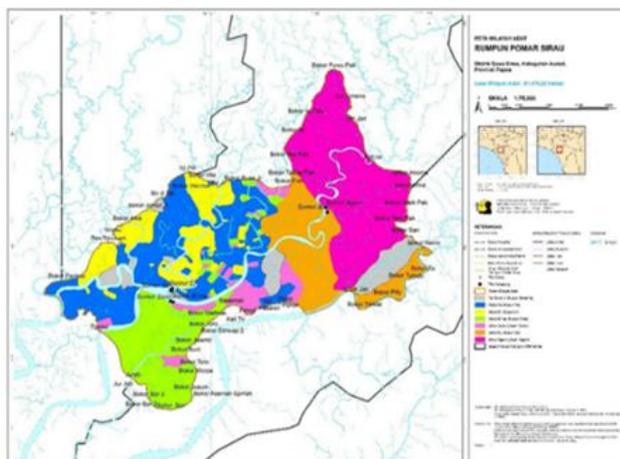
The advanced stage in the form of verification and submission of legal recognition to the Asmat Regency Government shows that mapping is positioned as an advocacy strategy for customary rights, not just data production, so that indigenous peoples are no longer placed as policy objects but appear as epistemic-political subjects that determine their own territorial boundaries (See Pomar Sirau Customary Territory Results of Indigenous Peoples Agreement – Figure 3). Parera (2023) notes that participatory mapping strengthens customary land rights because it generates a database that is socially valid and recognized in deliberative forums, so that decisions are taken through community authorities, rather than forced delegation from outside; thus this stage marks a shift from a "development for indigenous peoples" regime towards a "decisions by indigenous peoples" model as an important step in the decolonization of indigenous territory governance. This is seen in Table 2 below.

2. Process and Ladder of Participation

a. Participation Process of the Asmat Indigenous Peoples of the Pomar Sirau Cluster

The participation of the Pomar Sirau community in participatory mapping does not stand as a mere technical exercise but is deeply woven into their cosmological triad of humans–ancestors–nature, which constitutes the moral and ontological basis for engaging in territorial governance. Awareness of external threats to customary rights first emerged in Yahudi ritual spaces—communal houses that function as both cosmological centers and political arenas—where community members interpreted resource exploitation not only as economic dispossession but as a rupture in the relational order that binds them to ancestral guardians of the land (Nelson, 2020: 44–47; Morris et al., 2015; Summers, J., & Louis, 2017). This aligns with Escobar (2008) argument that indigenous territorial struggles are grounded in territorial ontologies—ways of being and knowing that tie identity to land—and therefore any threat to land is simultaneously a threat to social reproduction and world-making practices.

Table 2: Participation Rate of the Pomar Sirau Indigenous Peoples

Process Stages	Actors Involved	Form of Engagement	Participation Rate (Arnstein, modified Asmat context)	Field Findings
1. Collective Awareness	Elders, churchgoers, youth	Discussion of threats, reflections on rites in Jew	Consultation–Local Initiation	Awareness arises from concerns about the exploitation of forests and rivers
2. Mobilization by Parishes	Parish, Diocese of Agats, traditional figures	Gathering of the people, delivery of pastoral information	Community–Institutional Partnerships	The Church becomes a "symbolic link" that strengthens legitimacy
3. FPIC/Padiatapa	Elders, traditional women, youth, parishes	Open deliberations, risk analysis, dialogue	Meaningful Consent / Negotiation Equivalent	Information is discussed in the local language; collective decisions are made in Jew
4. Custom Data Collection	Elder, hunter, woman, youth	Forest searches, ancestral sites, river mapping	Field Collaboration	Knowledge of the landscape is gained through migration stories and the designation of sacred sites
5. Technical Mapping	BRWA, WWF, YASA, Youth	GPS recording, sketching, live validation	Equal Technical Partnerships	Youth are most actively operating technology; elders are directing the narrative
6. Data Validation and Affirmation	All village clans	Customary deliberations, boundary correction, site verification Customary deliberations, boundary correction, site verification	Community Control	The final version is not accepted until the elders approve each point
7. Advocacy Recognition	Customary structures, Churches, CSOs	Submission of results to local governments, policy dialogue	Collective Control/Indigenous Self-Reliance	Mapping documents are the basis for customary territory legal claims

Discussions that originated in ritual spaces gradually transformed into collective political agendas through ecclesiastical (parish) channels and customary governance structures. The church became not merely an institution of faith but, following Bourdieu's concept of "religious capital", an arena that legitimized community claims and mobilized social cohesion. The ability of parishes to convene meetings, issue moral guidance, and connect communities to broader institutional networks demonstrates how the church functions as an agent capable of converting symbolic capital into political leverage in favor of indigenous claims.

The involvement of external actors such as the Church, YASA, WWF, and BRWA did not replace local decision-making. Instead, these institutions operated within the epistemic horizon of Pomar Sirau society, facilitating translation between indigenous knowledge and the requirements of state legal frameworks (Santosa, 2022: 112–130; Arizona et al., 2019: 25–38; Emiyati et al., 2023). This process mirrors Escobar's cultural politics of development, where external institutions intervene not as authoritative agents but as mediators helping communities articulate indigenous ontologies into formats legible to state bureaucracies.

The implementation of FPIC strengthened principles of informed and meaningful participation across elders, women, and youth, affirming that acceptance of the mapping process constituted a political–cosmological decision free from coercion (Colchester & Ferrari, 2007: 9–22; Barelli, 2012; Ward, 2011: 56–71). From a Bourdieusian perspective, the FPIC process also reconfigured the field of interaction by enabling marginalized actors (women and youth) to exercise agency within customary and ecclesiastical arenas that typically favor elder dominance.

The final stages—historical documentation, identification of sacred landscapes, and spatial/non-spatial mapping—were undertaken collaboratively. Elders contributed ancestral narratives and sacred geographies; women identified ecological resources; youth provided technical skills such as GPS use. This collaborative division of labor illustrates the interplay of multiple capitals (symbolic, ecological, technical) within the mapping field. The results were then submitted for legal recognition as part of a community-driven advocacy strategy (Parera, 2023), showing how indigenous communities strategically navigate state structures without relinquishing epistemic sovereignty.

b. Ledder of Participation according to the Arnstein Model

Using Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation—reinterpreted through indigenous political ecology—the participation of the Pomar Sirau community clearly transcends the levels of Non-Participation. Instead of being passive recipients of decisions, the community orchestrates and controls most stages of the participatory mapping process (Kaehe et al., 2019; Lasa, 2022: 44–59). External actors function within a community-defined field, rather than dictating terms of participation. This corresponds with Bourdieu's insight that agents within a field seek to maintain or enhance their positions by deploying forms of capital—in this case, elders exert

symbolic capital, youth deploy technical capital, and the church provides moral and institutional capital.

Crucially, the involvement of NGOs and church institutions does not reduce the process to tokenism. The community's leading role in decision-making—ranging from determining territorial boundaries to validating cultural documents—illustrates participation at the level of Partnership and Delegated Power (Manufandu, 2022: 143–158;(Moysan & Ródenas-Rigla, 2024). Several domains even approach Citizen Control, particularly in the validation of customary boundaries and the interpretation of sacred sites, where state and NGO actors defer to customary authority.

From an Escobarian perspective, participatory mapping becomes an instrument of spatial decolonization, enabling indigenous actors to reassert territorial ontologies in the face of state and market pressures. Mapping is not merely the production of cartographic data but a political act that redefines control over space, knowledge, and representation. From a Bourdieusian lens, the process expands the community's capacity to negotiate within the bureaucratic field of the state by converting indigenous knowledge (symbolic capital) into formal legal claims (legal capital).

The impacts of this participatory process include strengthened legal recognition, resolution of tenure disputes, and enhanced capacity to manage natural resources (Usulu et al., 2024). The resulting datasets—grounded in indigenous epistemic authority—form a robust foundation for development planning that is sensitive to social structures, ecological relations, and cultural knowledge. Thus, participatory mapping in Pomar Sirau is not merely a community activity; it is a political project of reclaiming authority, reshaping power relations, and asserting indigenous identity through spatial representation.

c. Process Integration and Participation Rates

Analysis of the process and level of participation of the indigenous people of Pomar Sirau shows that community involvement is not only technical, but is a socio-cultural practice tied to cosmology, social capital, and local power relations. Theoretical engagement through the perspectives of Escobar, Bourdieu, and Arnstein helps explain how territorial ontologies, capital dynamics, and participation structures shape the way communities navigate participatory mapping. However, the relationship between theory and field data often appears descriptively and has not been fully elaborated analytically. Therefore, the following Table 3 presents a concise blend of empirical data and theoretical frameworks to clarify how these concepts work in the context of Pomar Sirau.

Table 2. Analysis of the Process & Degree of Participation of the Pomar Sirau Indigenous Peoples

Stages of the Participatory Mapping Process	Key Empirical Findings	Theoretical Analysis (Escobar–Bourdieu)	Ledder of Participation (Arnstein)
1. Early Identification & Threat Awareness	Consciousness emerges from the Jewish ritual space; Threats to land are understood as disturbances in human-ancestor-nature relations.	Escobar: land as an ontology; Threat = threat to the social world.	1. Early Identification & Threat Awareness
2. Community Consolidation through Customary & Church Structures	Customary discussions combined with church networks, parishes facilitate deliberation and social cohesion.	Bourdieu: the church transforms "religious capital" into "political capital".	2. Community Consolidation through Customary & Church Structures
3. Involvement of Supporting Actors (YASA, WWF, BRWA)	External actors help without replacing customary decisions; There is a translation between local knowledge and state legal standards.	Escobar: outside institutions as mediators, not hegemons.	3. Involvement of Supporting Actors (YASA, WWF, BRWA)
4. FPIC Implementation	Free-informed decisions are applied to all groups (elders, women, youth).	Bourdieu: redistribution of agent positions; subordinate groups gain voting space.	Partnership → Delegated Power (substantive decisions in the hands of the community).
5. Historical Documentation, Sacred Site Identification, Technical Mapping	Collaborative work: elders → narrative; women → ecological knowledge; Youth → technical skills.	A combination of capitals: symbolic, ecological, technical. Realizing a community-based political ecology.	Delegated Power → Citizen Control (full control over cultural interpretation & territorial boundaries).
6. Advocacy & Recognition of Customary Rights	Data is submitted for the recognition of customary territories; the community leads the political strategy.	Escobar: mapping as an act of decolonization of space.	6. Advocacy & Recognition of Customary Rights

The table provides a concise overview of how the participatory mapping process in Pomar Sirau unfolded and how the theories of Escobar, Bourdieu, and Arnstein help illuminate its dynamics. Empirically, the mapping is not interpreted as merely a technical exercise, but as a practice embedded in cosmological structures, relationships among customary actors, and the distribution of social, symbolic, and technical capital within the community. Each stage—from customary deliberations to boundary verification and legal advocacy—demonstrates that the community serves as the primary driver, while external actors function only as facilitators operating within a local epistemic framework.

Theoretically, the table illustrates how Escobar's perspective on territorial ontology explains the integration of knowledge, identity, and space within mapping practices. Meanwhile, Bourdieu's concepts of capital and field help explain how elders, youth, women, the church, and NGOs interact within a shifting power arena throughout the mapping process. Arnstein's ladder of participation complements the analysis by showing that the community occupies the levels of partnership to nearly citizen control, underscoring that their participation is substantive rather than merely consultative. Thus, the table summarizes the integration of field data and theory in understanding mapping as a cultural, political, and epistemic project.

D. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the participatory mapping process in the Pomar Sirau cluster demonstrates that Asmat engagement cannot be reduced to a technical procedure of spatial data production, but constitutes a socio-cultural and political project that rearticulates the relational world of humans–ancestors–land while expanding the community's capacity to negotiate within postcolonial fields of power. Internal awareness of territorial threats—initially voiced in ritual and communal spaces—evolved into organized collective action through church networks and customary structures, while support from YASA, WWF, and BRWA enabled the translation of Indigenous epistemologies into legally legible formats without displacing local authority. The implementation of FPIC shows that consent to mapping is a cosmological and political decision made freely across social groups, opening spaces for women and youth to renegotiate their positions within the social field, reflecting the dynamics of symbolic, moral, and technical capital described by Bourdieu. At the same time, the process embodies Escobar's notion of "territorialized cultural politics," where mapping becomes a tool of spatial decolonization and a means of inscribing local ontologies into a form

readable by the state. The outcome is not merely a set of maps but an enhancement of legal recognition, mitigation of tenure conflicts, and a consolidation of the Pomar Sirau community's epistemic sovereignty in governing their ancestral territory.

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