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## Playing Under The Fly Over: A Collaborative Creative Community in Bandung

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### Abstract

The Pasupati flyover (Pasteur-Surapati) connecting Bandung to Jakarta has become a new symbol for the city. Recent policy has made the space located under the bridge, transformed from ‘dead space’ into a socially-significant urban space for marginal people governed by many stakeholders and consequently a contestation of multiple and conflicting interests including the governmental and corporate interests. The community interests are only one amongst many who invested in this space. This paper draws on a participatory research method to explore the lived experiences and creative activities held under the bridge, with a particular focus on the urban activism of *Komunitas Taman Kota* (Urban Park Community) and their collaborative work with local communities. In this paper we argue that through reclaiming the ‘flyover’ under space, community activists are asserting rights of the local community and the wider interests of the people of Bandung, against domination of state or neoliberal privatization.

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### Introduction

Public space plays an important role in the social life of urban communities. The social value of public space is wide-ranging and includes the contribution it makes to people’s attachment to their locality, their memories and

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imaginings of place and identity, and the opportunities it provides for social interaction with others (Dines and Cattell et al., 2006). Such spaces provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas, goods, skills, and friendship and thus have a key role in facilitating social interaction, social inclusion, and the development of community ties. Public space can thus act as a self-organising public service, a shared spatial resource that can improve people's quality of life through providing experiences and value that are not available within the private lives of individuals (Mean et al., 2005).

Habermas (1990) describes the 'public sphere' as a discursive space in which the conditions of communication allow individuals and groups within civil society, to freely express their private interests, goals and values such that common concerns and judgments can emerge. Ideally, different community groups can access public space on a level footing, communicating autonomously and participating equally in the construction of a social consensus. Such civil society groups can be considered not only actors within but also producers of public space itself (Hardiman, 1996). For Habermas, the public sphere is egalitarian, inclusive, pluralistic, and open, enabling inter-cultural dialog and the identification of shared interests while remaining free from state coercion or domination by political and economic elites. In this sense, public space can be identified as part of an autonomous community sphere of social solidarity, as distinct from both the capitalist market economy and the bureaucratic state apparatus.

However, in practice, public space is a terrain of conflict and struggle between different functions and interests. Bandung and other Indonesian cities have been shaped by rapid and contested processes of urbanization, industrialization and de-industrialization, and the heightened class inequalities associated with these developments have been inscribed in the organization of urban space (Douglass 2008; Kusno 2000:146-148; McGee 2002; Nas and Pratiwo 2003). While providing cultural, social, and physical infrastructure, the resources provided by this urban development are not equally accessible to all of the city's inhabitants. Indeed, such development has been entangled in processes of social exclusion, exploitation, and dispossession.

Such forms of urban development are situated within global circuits, flows, and processes of capital accumulation, yet are also marked by specific local histories, landscapes, values, and relationships (Bishop, Phillips and Yeo 2003; Douglass 2008; Harvey 2012:11-15). As Bishops, Phillips and Yeo (2003:12) argue, particular cityscapes 'perpetuate notions of urban space and urban existence, just as our collective imaginations about cities perpetuate various empirical and corporeal interactions with them and other people.

The urban activist and community group Komunitas Taman Kota positions itself in opposition to the enclosure of public space, engaging in a struggle for the establishment of urban commons and what David Harvey (2012), following Lefebvre (1996), calls the 'right to the city'. This is not only a demand for access to public space, but also an attempt to 'create new common spaces for socialization and political action' (Harvey 2012: xvi). In reclaiming the spaces of the city as a site for autonomous yet collaborative forms of artistic and social creativity, Komunitas Taman Kota plays an active role in the production of an urban commons of shared value, mutual aid and communication. In helping to articulate and promote community claims to the zone beneath the Pasupati flyover, Komunitas Taman Kota thus contributes to the constitution of an autonomous community in the process of self-creation. In contrast to sterile legalistic conceptualizations of the 'bourgeois public sphere', this reveals the power of the 'constituent imagination'—that is, the ability of a social group to establish its social order and system of values (Castoriadis 1987; Graeber 2009:266; Hardt and Negri 2009).

Thus, the Pasupati Flyover is more than a means of transportation with a leftover complement of 'dead space' beneath. Rather, this space has been claimed by community actors who draw on their collective power, mutual aid and solidarity to participate in the production, dissemination and multiplication of public space. This action is characterized by a form of self-organization which can be described in terms of 'structured anarchy', reliant on autonomy, participation, accessibility, and the rejection of social and political hierarchies. The voices of the flyover community express their civic values of courage, friendship, and solidarity and refuse both the imposition of state authority and the competitive individualism of the market.

In this paper, the authors will describe and analyze the processes through which the values of autonomy and community have been produced and transformed through the reclaiming of the public space of the Pasupati flyover. In doing so, we hope to convey how the 'excess' or 'wasted' space beneath the flyover has become a valuable resource for the local community. Furthermore, we will explain how, through their practical activities of creative production and community organization, the Komunitas Taman Kota have drawn on the collaborative activity of multiple groups from diverse backgrounds to establish this space as a base for local empowerment as well as

forming part of a much wider network of creative urban ‘commoning’ which extends nationally and globally. For this study, the authors have adopted a participatory method, combining participant observation, in-depth interviews and literature studies (Mikkelsen, 2005), with engaged fieldwork and socially-situated interviews having been carried out by Frans Ari Prasetyo.

### Reclaiming Urban Space

In 2005, the City of Bandung constructed Pasupati Flyover over Tamansari valley and Bandung’s main river, the Cikapundung, to connect Pasteur Road in the eastern part of Bandung with Surapati road in the western part. Various impression given to this 2.5 km long flyover, built over 2.4 hectare areas, supported by 46 pillars - as a new icon for the city and an ugly eyesore. Built on the former densely populated Tamansari neighborhood of the Bandung Wetan, it displaced 300 households from RW 04, RW 11, and RW 15. They were relocated to Cisaranten, 10 km to the eastern part of the city (Yasin 2006). Ironically after the construction, the flyover created a zone of ‘dead space’ across part of the valley where residents had previously established communal, public spaces (Figure1).



Fig. 1. (A) Upper Pasupati Flyover (2011); (B) Under Pasupati Flyover (2012). Photo by Frans A. Prasetyo

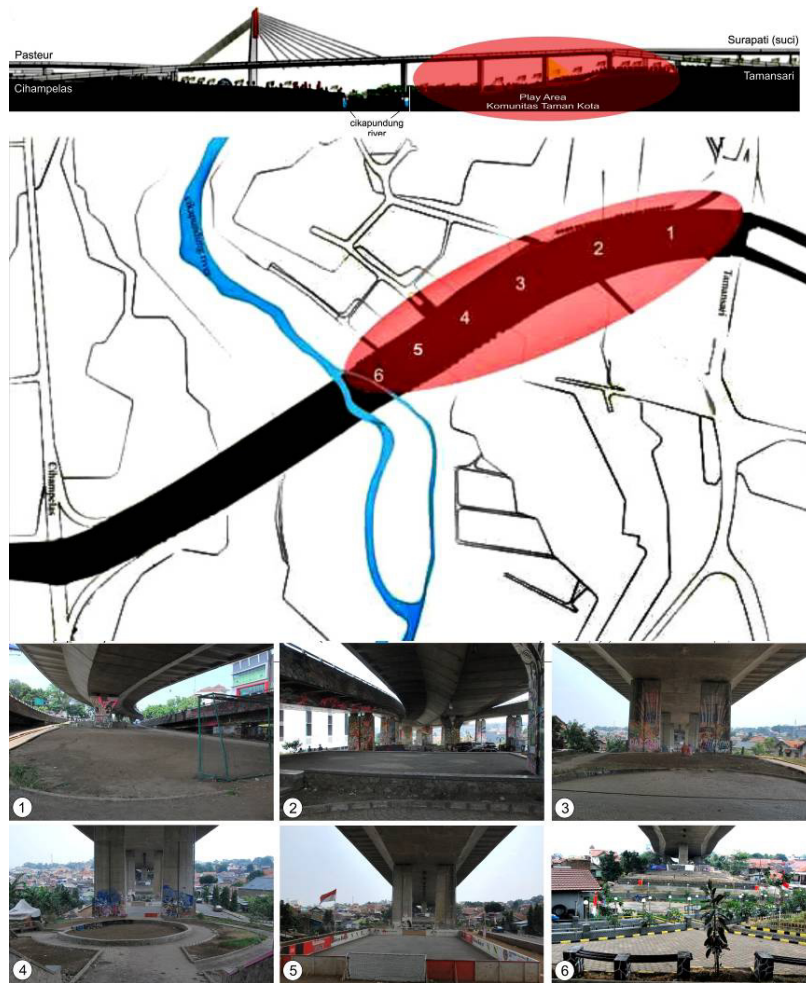


Fig. 2. Play area for Komunitas Taman Kota under the Pasupati Flyover. Photo by Frans A. Prasetyo (2012)

The picture is that for the sake of developing infrastructure to increase the massive urban speed, mobility, and activity of urban transport, the development of Pasupati Flyover has delayed and hindered the local mobility and collective activities of people living in the area. This fits with a tendency of infrastructure projects for ‘urban development’ that destroy and displace communal life of urban communities (McGee 2002). It also reflects a general trend in the ‘spatialisation of class divisions’ in Indonesian cities, that the space of the ‘modern’ middle-class is separated from the kampung of the urban poor (Kusno 2000:146-148). Indeed, as Mike Davis (2006) argues, that under neoliberal capitalism, the increasing sections of the urban population—particularly the urban poor engaged in the informal economy—are regarded an unnecessary surplus or even an obstacle to economic development. As follow, in general, displacement and dispossession have become characteristic experiences of urban life (Davis 2006; Harvey 2012:11-15; Kasmir and Carbonella 2008). Indonesian streetscapes are shaped by both a discontent to the image of urban poor ‘masses’ and an attempt to inscribe a wilful repression to the memory of past conflicts into their physical and symbolic forms (Nas and Pratiwo 2003).

Urban public spaces cannot be assumed to be spaces for free expression or action of the ‘civil society’; such spaces are often tightly controlled by state and private corporate interests, though this control may also be contested (Douglass 2008; Lim 2008). Indeed, urban community activists around the world have mobilized to contest such inclusivity and reclaim their right to the urban commons. Groups such as ‘Reclaim the Streets’ and ‘Occupy Wall

Street' have carried out dramatic and festive forms of direct action protest to reclaim public space as a terrain for political and social expression outside of official and privatized channels (Graeber 2009; Harvey 2012:116-117; Starr 2005:188-189). In Indonesia, street protest movements have reclaimed the sterile spaces of official nationalism as transient yet powerful spaces of insurgency (Lim 2008). However, there are also attempts at less dramatic but more sustainable forms of autonomous community-building, as exemplified by the 'Do It Yourself' cultural production and self-organisation of urban youth involved in Indonesia's thriving punk scene (Martin-Iverson 2011).

Inspired by such examples, Komunitas Taman Kota (Urban Park Community) has sought to reclaim the 'dead space' beneath the Pasupati Flyover as a vibrant venue for collective empowerment and playfulness. Since 2009, they have organised a range of creative community events and activities in the area beneath the bridge, which they have renamed 'Taman Kojé' (from Taman kolong jembatan or 'Under the Bridge Park'; see Figure 1 B). This area is used as a community space for Komunitas Taman Kota and other civil society groups from Bandung, and is an important place for them to engage with daily living in the area and others (Figure 2). However, this communal park has not been given official recognition, and it is not listed in the official registry of the Bandung Parks and Cemetery Service (as in 2012, Bandung has 604 official parks in 29 districts, covering 215.358 ha).

### **Komunitas Taman Kota (City Park Community)**

Komunitas Taman Kota was a community formed in 2006, originating from activities in an independent-bookstore, Baca-Baca. Over time, the community began to focus on providing libraries and programs to empower children, especially through making use of public parks and similar spaces in the city. They carry out a range of activities motivated by the ethics of friendship, solidarity, pluralism, tolerance, and cross-cultural exchange. Their mode of operation is participatory and based on voluntary association; they emphasize the free and open exchange of ideas and transfer of knowledge, without coercive authority or social hierarchy. For Komunitas Taman Kota activists, empowering community access to public space is a cultural investment in human value and a vital element in the development sense of equality and justice among urban society.

Concretely, in their work with the Pasupati flyover community, these urban activists encourage self-governance, self-regulation, and self-reliance, establishing a commons of shared resources derived from collaboration among the social groups and individuals that constitute the flyover community. They act as a mediating role in the informal discourses and practices while maintaining self-organization character of the community, facilitating horizontal, inclusive, and interwoven forms of communication that help establishing consensus and solidarity which enables autonomous self-expression and freedom of association. Attempts are made to encourage participation and accommodate multiple points of view, thus promoting interaction between various forms of creative production. For Komunitas Taman Kota, urban space is a collective resource, a vector of communication and a valuable learning tool.

### **Playing Under The Flyover**

Project 'Berteman Taman' (Friendship Park) is the main activity of the City Park Community, where they seek to use this area of urban space for a variety of activities, such as informal playground, public education, music performances, discussions, workshops, exhibitions, and other community activities in Bandung. In making use of the space beneath the Pasupati Flyover for these fun and educational activities, they hoped to build up a community spirit and a sense of attachment to and collective ownership over the space. This goal is expressed in the information and publicity flyer distributed around the city and through online digital media (Figure 3).

These events rely on donations and other voluntary contributions from the public, and these funds are also used to support their other activities in empowering communities, reclaiming parks and other public spaces, and providing free education activities to local children through 'Sekolah Taman' (Park School). Sekolah Taman is an informal schooling program, drawing on volunteer teachers with diverse educational backgrounds, skills, and knowledge to provide an eclectic but valued curriculum of education (see Figure 4).



Fig. 3. (A) Event was commemorating Earth Day; (B) Fundraising event to support a friend who was ill (Source : Author Document)



Fig. 4. (A) Sekolah Taman (Point 2 in Fig. 2) involving local residents from RW 04 (2010); (B) Sekolah Taman (Point 3 in Fig. 2) involving RW 11 (2012). Photo by Frans Ari Prasetyo

Through the school, children and others are given the freedom to respond to the space under the flyover by using it as a space for activities they enjoy, such as playing, drawing, reading, and more. The Sekolah Taman (Park school) program also draws on the work of a local artist affiliated with Komunitas Taman Kota who, since 2007, has used the flyover structure as a medium for his ‘street art’ (Figure 5). He has painted or plans to paint murals on 20 of the flyover pillars, starting with the pillar on Cihampelas to Tamansari road. These murals are voluntary works done by a single individual, without any commercial or government sponsorship. In his words, because the flyover provides a blank page, he feels that he has to decorate it.



Fig.5. Local artists create works of art murals on the walls of the flyover pillars. Photo by Frans Ari Prasetyo (2011)



Fig. 6. (A) Punk Collective workshop to recycle electronic goods (2010) ; (B) Collective craft and knitting (2012). Photo by Frans Ari Prasetyo

Komunitas Taman Kota activities involve collaboration among different communities and social groups, forming friendships across boundaries by sharing ‘something nice’ in a city park. The collective also organizes a variety of skill-sharing workshops, such as recycling discarded objects into new valued objects, knitting workshops, and other craft activities (Figure 6). The use of the area under the flyover is not only instructive but can also be entertaining. The collective not only produces social and print media about their community park activities, but also organizes events such as music performances. For example, local musicians joined a percussion band from Jakarta to perform in the park beneath the flyover, held a percussion workshop for children, and filmed a video beneath the flyover (Figure 7A). There is a collective focus on documenting and disseminating their activities, to encourage and demonstrate their participatory nature and community synergy. However, they also show ‘Movies for Public’ films in the park aimed at attracting, entertaining, and educating a wider public (Figure 7B). Sometimes, for events such as the football World Cup, other public or community groups organize their movie events, with Komunitas Taman Kota providing the equipment and encouraging them to use the park. This demonstrates the building of a relationship of communication and solidarity between Komunitas Taman Kota and the wider public, each encouraging the other to take an active role in the use of the urban space.

At Taman Koje, it is not only abstract ideas and knowledge that is shared, but also material objects. Events called ‘lapak gratis’ (free stalls) are used to give away goods to those who might find them useful or interesting (Figure 8). This activity enabled individuals and groups to display a wide range of goods which they no longer need or want (or that they simply wish to give away for the pleasure of giving) so that anyone may simply take them for free. With the motto ‘take what you need and leave what you do not’, it is neither strict barter nor a commercial sale but a generalized gift exchange. The lapak gratis follows in the tradition of the ‘free markets’ which have been organized around the world as an alternative mechanism for exchange.



Fig. 7. (A) Filming video clips and workshop (2012); (B) Watching movies together under the flyover (2010). Photo by Frans Ari Prasetyo



Fig.8. Lapak Gratis (free stall). Photo by Frans Ari Prasetyo (2010)

The presence of this self-organized community in the public space under the Pasupati Flyover has also encouraged other people to take the initiative to make effective use of this space. For example, the public gatherings under the flyover encouraged a group to build a mini soccer (futsal) field in the area (Figure 9). Although this involved a third party sponsor rather than the Komunitas Taman Kota, it demonstrates their success in developing the area into a magnet for the public. The addition of further public facilities and amenities can be expected to attract further interest from various groups, including commercial and government interests.





Fig. 9. Futsal sports facilities. Photo by Frans Ari Prasetyo (2012)

Komunitas Taman Kota itself organizes its modest activities, sometimes alongside other community groups, but without major sponsorship, as they are not seeking to promote a particular private interest. Rather, they simply want to share the space so that it can become a true ‘Friendship Park’ rather than just dead space under the flyover. So, as long as it remains publically accessible they are happy to accept the building of the sports area even though they were not directly involved in its construction.

The activities of the Komunitas Taman Kota demonstrate that creativity and innovation rely on a collective ‘commons’ of shared ideas, skills, and social relationships (Hyde 1983; Shorthose and Strange 2004). However, such relatively autonomous creative commons may also be appropriated and enclosed into the production of privatised value through gentrification and other neoliberal forms of urban development (Böhm and Land 2009; Harvey 2002; Ross 2009:15-76). Indeed, the collective infrastructure of groups like the Komunitas Taman Kota has played an important role in the development of Bandung’s creative industries (Iskandar 2006; Martin-Iverson 2012; Soemardi and Radjawali 2004). Nevertheless, for the time being, the Komunitas Taman Kota have succeeded in transforming the ‘dead space’ under the flyover into a space of play, learning, and community-building.

### **Conclusion: Autonomy and Community Under The Flyover**

When the Pasupati Flyover was built, the space beneath became an ‘excess’ space, without any social value. But through the positive actions of the Komunitas Taman Kota and the people of the neighborhood, this marginal space was reclaimed as a space for public empowerment, autonomy, and community. The formation of Taaman Koje arose from a relationship forged among multiple elements, including the Komunitas Taman Kota activists, local residents, the wider civil society of Bandung, and the space itself, to produce and animate this new, playful form of public space beneath the flyover. The underlying motivation for Komunitas Taman Kota is to serve as civil partners to the people living under and around the flyover, to actively participate with them in building an autonomous space for communication and social solidarity outside of the market and state control. Komunitas Taman Kota invites the public to rid themselves of their designation as ‘the masses’ and instead take on the role of autonomous subjects forming a participatory community based on free association, playful affinity, and mutual aid.

The activities within the Taman Koje generate new experiences of urban space through sharing and building knowledge, resources, social networks, and other activities. This contributes to improving the quality of life of local people, pointing the way towards more ecologically, economically and socially sustainable modes of urban life and relationships to the urban environment. Through positioning the space as a zone of communication, exchange, and collaboration, they are supporting the development of a new ‘urban commons’. This phenomenon accord to what Harvey (2012) as space for collective, and non-commodified relation between a social group and their urban environment, and an active social practice of ‘commoning’ (Hardt and Negri 2009; Harvey 2012: Linebaugh 2008).

Douglass (2008) refers to this struggle as civil society acting ‘for itself’ to claim public space as a terrain for communication and political action. The existence of public space under the flyover in the city of Bandung can be expected to strengthen the social fabric of urban society in Bandung, especially for those living in the shadow of the Pasupati Flyover. It allows for a new social relation to urban geography, adapting to the changing urban landscape while valuing the spatial history of the city.

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