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Art, activism and the ‘Creative Kampong’: A case study from Dago Pojok, Bandung, Indonesia.

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Abstract

Kampong Dago Pojok is a local neighborhood within the Dago area of Bandung, an area well-known for its cultural and artistic activities which have contributed significantly to the development of Bandung as a ‘creative city’ in the early 2000s. However, Kampong Dago Pojok has largely been excluded from this development and the wider creative atmosphere of the city. In response to this, the community art activist group Komunitas Taboo has collaborated with local kampong communities to adapt the ‘creative city’ concept to local conditions and forms of social organization, establishing it as a ‘creative kampong’.

This paper draws on a participatory research method to explore the lived experiences and creative practices of those who make use of the kampong, with a particular focus on the urban activism of Komunitas Taboo and their collaborative work with local communities. It describes how the ‘creative kampong’ is expressed and produced within the daily ‘traditional activities’ of Kampong Dago Pojok residents, as well as the community organizing work carried out through Komunitas Taboo. These activities draw on local knowledge and practices, and the kampong’s social, economic and geographic position within the Dago area and the city of Bandung, to produce value for the community and to build a social movement for the ‘creative kampong’ as a localized counterpart to the ‘creative city’.

Their vision for this community work is to develop a more sustainable and equitable future for this neighborhood, establishing the creative kampong as a vital part of the ‘creative city’ while also posing an autonomous challenge to the dominant forms of neoliberal urban development associated with it. At the same time, the forms of urban activism and artistic production associated with the creative kampong are themselves open to being drawn into such forms of development, producing forms of creative labor and social capital that contribute to the commodification of the creative community. Through revealing such conflicts and contradictions in the creative kampong project, this case study points to new ways of thinking about processes of urban kampong development in relation to community activism, the creative industries, the informal economy, and localized social networks.

Keywords: CREATIVE CITY, CREATIVE KAMPONG, COMMUNITY ACTIVISM, DAGO POJOK, BANDUNG

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1. Introduction

Bandung is an important center for art and popular culture in Indonesia, and the creative industries have played a significant role in the development of the city. Government and industry have sought to harness this creativity within a ‘creative city’ development framework, a neoliberal approach to urban development which supports the creative industries and associated forms of property speculation without distributing the benefits evenly among local urban communities (Harvey, 2012:89-112; Peck, 2005; Ross 2009). This paper investigates the ways in which an activist urban art collective has sought to intervene in a local community to develop a locally-grounded, independent alternative to the ‘creative city’ – what we label the ‘creative kampong’. Based in the commercial and residential neighborhood of Dago Pojok, the community art group known as ‘Komunitas Taboo’ has succeeded in establishing a wide range of participatory art and cultural activities, while also supporting local community initiative and organization. However, while they have adopted a collaborative approach which empowers the local community in many respects, they have not managed to fully overcome the divide between specialized cultural professionals and the local community. As in the more overtly top-down ‘creative city’ approach, the activist-driven ‘creative kampong’ still constructs the local community as an object of development.

The Dago area in northern Bandung has a long history as an important location for commerce, socializing, transport, and more recently as a residential area, reflecting the wider history of Bandung’s urban development. The neighborhood is named for the major thoroughfare, still commonly known as ‘Jalan Dago’ despite being officially renamed ‘Jalan Ir. H. Juanda’ in 1970. The name ‘Jalan Dago’ is variously attributed to an epithet of Prince Suryadiningrat, the younger brother of Sultan Agung of Mataram, whose descendent Prince Wiradadaha became the First Regent of Sukapura after suppressing the Dipatiukur rebellion in the Sunda region (Suradimadja, 2011). Indeed, Jalan Dago intersects with Jalan Dipatiukur at the landmark ‘Simpang Dago’ intersection, a key commercial area and the site of the Pasar Simpang Dago. Alternatively, the Dago name may also derive from the Sundanese language expression ‘silih dagoan’, referring to the way in which farmers would gather together near the road in the early morning in order to travel into the city for the market (__, 2010). In any case, Jalan Dago has long been an important transport route in northern Bandung, and the Simpang Dago area also developed into a significant destination in its own right.

During colonial times the area along the Dagostraat became an elite Dutch residential settlement, and the road still boasts rows of heritage buildings in the classic Dutch colonial style associated with the Dutch Indies Architectural Community (NIAK—Nederland Indie Architecture Krink) (__, 2010). Some indigenous settlements were also established in the area, initially as waiting places but these eventually developed into kampong (village) settlements, including the Kampong Dago Pojok (Dago Corner Village) neighborhood. Through the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, these settlements became increasingly urbanized, attracting Chinese and Arab traders as well as Sundanese villagers (Sumardjo, 2012). Today, these kampong neighborhoods include houses in the traditional Sundanese style as well as newer homes with a more modern flavor. Like many neighborhoods in Bandung, in Kampong Dago Pojok one encounters a meeting of urban and rural traditions and styles. Kampong Dago Pajok is located within the administrative zone RW 03 of Kelurahan Dago (see Figure 1), which covers an area of 258 hectares and has a resident population of 25 327 people. Dago Pojok itself (RW 03) houses 1 512 people in an area of 30 hectares (__, 2011).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Dago area was converted into a commercial center, with hotels, cafes, and factory outlets. Along with this development, Dago regained its historical role as a meeting place, though it became a ‘hangout’ for urban youth rather than farmers. Dago has become an important site for the rockers, punks, and other subcultural youth whose alternative lifestyles and creative endeavors have contributed substantially to the development of Bandung as a ‘creative city’. However, most local kampong residents were not actively engaged with these developments. Residents of Dago Pojok subsist on low incomes, derived
from informal and insecure labor, and have poor access to education, employment opportunities, and public services, let alone the forms of modern consumption associated with creative lifestyles.

Recognizing the exclusion of local communities from the creative city, artists and activists have intervened to form the ‘Komunitas Taboo’, a group which seeks to establish a ‘creative kampong’ in Dago Pojok. This paper explores this ‘creative kampong’ project, as a case study of artistic activism oriented towards the production of value and development of community life at the local level. This includes an important role for the kampong as an area of public space which can serve as a collective resource for creative development and community empowerment. Komunitas Taboo seeks to transform Kampong Dago Pojok into a creative community through education, arts, culture, and local economic activities organized in a collaborative and participatory manner. They hope to develop critical awareness, build social solidarity, and energize local organizations so that the kampong residents can claim their place within the wider creative city of Bandung. In doing so, however, they also replicate some of the inequalities of power and the commodification of creativity associated with the ‘creative city’ as a neoliberal form of urban development.

Historically, the ability of a city to develop new and innovative ideas has been perceived as a key factor in urban success, particularly from an economic perspective (Jacobs, 1969). This exploratory study asks how the ‘creative city’ discourse traveled to Bandung, and the implications of transferring such ideas to a developing kampong. Furthermore, we will explain how, through their practical activities of creative production and community organization, the Komunitas Taboo 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 communities which extends the ‘creative city’ to a national and even global scale.

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. Research has been conducted using grounded theory and an ethnographic case study approach, using an extended study of the Komunitas Taboo and the Kampong Dago Pojok in order to investigate wider issues of creativity, community organizing, and local urban development. Thus, we use a close description of a specific social group in order to generate or discover a theoretical analysis that relates to the context of this particular situation, and the ways in which the individuals concerned engage with or respond to this situation and interact with each other.

Spardley (1997) defines culture, as observed ethnographically, as a learning process that people use to interpret the world around them and to develop behavioral strategies to deal with it. Thus, Spardley argues that ethnography should not be restricted to the study of small, isolated communities positioned as exotic ‘other’ cultures; rather, it can be a useful tool for the study of modern, multicultural and urban communities as part of global society. It is from this perspective that we address the case study of Dago Pojok as a ‘creative kampong’ which is intimately enmeshed in wider cultural, political, and economic processes.

2. The creative city and the creative kampong

Due to the advanced development of its creative industries, Bandung has been recognized as a leading creative city in the region (Iskandar, 2006; Soemardi and Radjawali, 2004; Suherman, 2009). This has included being selected by the UNESCO Creative City Network. Concretely, the city of Bandung has sought to become an attractive location for creative professionals such as artists, musicians, designers, and intellectuals, as part of an urban development strategy aimed at encouraging a vibrant and profitable creative sector. The Indonesian government has identified key economic sectors associated with the creative city, namely (1) advertising, (2) architecture, (3) art market, (4) handicraft, (5) design, (6) fashion, (7) visual
industry (film, video and photography), (8) interactive games, (9) music, (10) performance art, (11) print publishing, (12) software, (13) radio and television, (14) research and development (__, 2008). The City of Bandung identifies an additional sector, the culinary industry, as part of its creative city planning. These fifteen sectors include 5,291 businesses that comprise the city’s creative economy (Muftiadi, 2010). The creative economy is often described as an economic sector based on the production of ideas (Hawkins, 2002); as such, it is also a form of labor that exploits human intelligence, subjectivity, and sociality (Hardt and Negri, 2004; Lazzarato, 1996).

Several of these creative economy sectors are already present in Kampong Dago Pojok, although they are not developed optimally for the modern forms of entrepreneurial and corporate enterprise associated with the creative city concept. Dago Pojok is located in an area with a historical role as a center of creative activity, including education, tourism, and entertainment. However, like other postcolonial cities, Bandung is marked by a significant class disparity which is also reflected in access to and use of urban space (Kusno, 2000). The inhabitants of Dago Pojok have not had much access to the fruits of Bandung’s development as a ‘creative city’. Still, the community fabric of the kampong is a potential resource for alternative forms of development. As Shorthose and Strange (2004) argue, artistic production relies on the collaborative creativity and social cooperation of autonomous creative communities. The creative city approach to urban development seeks to appropriate such autonomous sociality for the production of value conceived in narrow economic terms (Arvidsson, 2007; Böhm and Land, 2009; Harvey, 2012; Peck, 2005).

While the ‘creative kampong’ approach that we identify in the activities of Komunitas Taboo in Kampong Dago Pojok has many similarities with the ‘creative city’ framework, it seeks to avoid the alienation of value and the social exclusion which often results through adopting a more democratic, grassroots approach to creative urban development. The ‘creative kampong’ label was adopted by some urban communities in Bandung following the declaration of the ‘creative city’ policy in 2008, and could be viewed simply as a localization strategy to implement this development framework at a local level. However, we argue that the development of Kampong Dago Pojok as a ‘creative kampong’ through community arts, education and activist programs represents a creative form of engagement with and challenge to the ‘creative city’ as officially constructed.

Fig 1: (A) Dago Village, (B) Kampong Dago Pojok

2.1. Komunitas Taboo

The community art and activist group Komunitas Taboo, based in Dago Pojok, is closely associated with Rahmat Jabaril, a 44-year old artist and activist known for his paintings and other visual art which raise social
issues. He approaches his art as a form of protest against the forms of social inequality, abuses of state power, bureaucratic corruption, environmental destruction, and other injustices which he has experienced personally and witnessed in his everyday life. After the Reformasi movement successfully brought an end to the Suharto era, Jabaril decided that it was time for these activists to enact social change at the local community level by building a popular movement for a just and prosperous society. Moreover, he believes that art and culture must play a major role in such a movement. While Jabaril is not a native to Dago Pojok, in 2003 he initiated Komunitas Taboo in response to concerns that local kampong residents were being excluded from the development of Dago as a major tourist and commercial area. For example, during the 2003 Dago Festival local residents were mostly reduced to passively watching the events which closed the road and disrupted their lives without involving them in any of the decision-making processes or the economic benefits of the festival.

Rahmat Jabaril moved to Dago Pojok in 2003, and continued his personal artistic activities while also seeking to develop a local artistic community. He was able to attract other artists who work across different media and styles, and eventually established an informal, oral agreement to organize artistic and cultural activities with local residents. From these modest beginnings, the process snowballed and resulted in the growth of the Komunitas Taboo centered on the bookshop, gallery and community art center of that name. Jabaril approaches his work as a means for the exchange of information, knowledge, skills, ideas and values amongst kampong residents, thus empowering the local community to improve their own lives through creative production and social action. As Jabaril describes it, the kampong itself is a space for educational, cultural, and economic activities over which the local community has sovereignty, while activists and artists such as himself play a facilitating and catalyzing role.\[b\]

Through initiating Komunitas Taboo, Jabaril and his fellow artist-activists sought to support the kampong residents to develop a more independent consciousness and take control over the development of their own community. This idea of supporting community empowerment and public awareness through the arts reflects a wider movement in social activism and socially-engaged art. Initially, active involvement in Komunitas Taboo was largely confined to outside artists and activists, and some more educated community members. However, over time more local people became involved and started to exercise more democratic control over the activities of Komunitas Taboo. This accorded the group more legitimacy, and their active engagement in the project helped local people to overcome their alienation from their own community while challenging the negative image of Dago Pojok as a ‘backward’ and undeveloped urban kampong. Within the framework of the ‘creative kampong’, residents are able to claim a freedom of self-expression while remaining within the framework of community consensus, thus restricting the commodification of these creative activities.

Local kampong residents are often reticent to engage in overtly political activities; however, art appears as a relatively ‘safe’ tool for social struggle, while still serving as a potentially transformative form of action as it enables the expression of powerful feelings of joy, anger, passion, refinement, power, cynicism, or fear while reflecting on society and desires for change. The community art activities of Komunitas Taboo support the expression of the shared experiences of enjoying living and working together, feeling anger at the inequalities of life, desiring to achieve one’s dreams, refinement as a local moral value, being empowered to legitimize or delegitimize local administrative authority, cynicism at the commodification of politics, and fear of exploitation and conflicts over land.

Komunitas Taboo promotes community empowerment through organized education programs, including alternative lessons for children and a community library. While initially there were some difficulties in engaging the local community in these activities, especially due to the divide between long-term residents and more recent migrants to the area, the use of art and performance as the medium facilitated local involvement,

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\[b\] Interview with Rahmat Jabaril (December 2012)
as it was perceived as free entertainment rather than a didactic development project. Through speaking to the community in a vernacular artistic idiom, using concrete manifestations of creativity that local people can understand and relate to, the Komunitas Taboo activists were able to invite them to engage in a dialogue. This fits with the oral culture of the kampong, and Komunitas Taboo was thus able to establish itself as part of the kampong community and thus begin to effectively implement its creative community development mission.

2.2 Community education through art

The Komunitas Taboo programs were initially conceived as a way to develop the creative potential of local children as part of an informal education strategy (Fig 3). The idea was to use art education, alongside reading and writing, to stimulate the development of creative potential and educational achievement by giving them the freedom to experiment and express themselves creatively. Through making education fun and liberating, the children will become invested in the learning process thus enabling their progress to be sustained.

Fig 3: (A) Informal Learning Atmosphere, (B) village children in kampong dago pojok learning to play traditional Sundanese music instrument after school

The informal education carried out through the Komunitas Taboo was intended to supplement children’s formal education in school. However, for many children who were not attending school, it became an alternative to formal education, and thus had to develop a more comprehensive approach. In Kampong Dago Pojok there are many children who drop out of school due to economic factors; also, many of their parents had only a primary school (SD) or perhaps junior high (SMP) education, while some had never been to school at all. Table 1 shows the distribution of education in Dago Village, where Kampong Dago Pojok is located, showing that few local residents had progressed beyond the high school level, despite Bandung as a whole being characterized by a high level of education by Indonesian standards. It was hoped that by offering informal education in an enjoyable and non-threatening community environment, those who had been excluded from the formal education system would be able to benefit from more self-directed education and build up their skills, self-confidence, and self-respect.

In an effort to overcome a perceived deficit in national education levels, in 1984 the Indonesian government started the program 6 Years Compulsory Education aiming to universalize primary school education; in 1994 this was extended to a 9 Year program to ensure a junior high school education (Muklis, 2012). Ultimately, the Indonesian government plans to move towards a compulsory 12-year high school education, though many Indonesian families will find it difficult to achieve this without substantial social and economic support.
Table 1: Urban Population in Dago By Education Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Children were not attending school</td>
<td>2194</td>
<td>2171</td>
<td>4325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Children who did not finish primary</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>1622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Primary graduated</td>
<td>2776</td>
<td>2731</td>
<td>5507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Middle school graduated</td>
<td>1643</td>
<td>1868</td>
<td>3511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>High school graduated</td>
<td>1660</td>
<td>1569</td>
<td>3229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bachelor (D3)</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>1775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Schoolar (S1)</td>
<td>1156</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Master (S2)</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Post Graduate (S3), dll</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: Dago Village Profile, 2011)

Responding to this educational environment, Komunitas Taboo sought to establish itself as an informal education system, meeting the continuing needs of children and adults who have not graduated from primary, junior high or high school. On this basis, in 2009 they established a Center for Community Learning (PKBM) which has been recognized by the Indonesian government as a community education institution, which can deliver education programs with the approval of the Department of Education. The activities of the PKBM include: (1) Educational Equality: Package A, Package B and Package C, (2) Early Childhood Education (ECD), (3) Functional Literacy Education, (4) Public Reading (TBM), (5) Skills Training, Life Skills and Courses, (6) Citizenship Education, Household and Parenting, (7) Mental and Spiritual Education - Religious, (8) Educational Entrepreneurship, Productive Business Community, Business Study Group, (9) Arts Education, Culture and Sports (10) Environmental Education, Forest Conservation, Agricultural Extension, Livestock and Fisheries, (11) Public Health Education. (http://pkbm-indonesia.com/pkbm).

Through these PKBM activities, Komunitas Taboo became a partner in the government's educational programs. The first PKBM programs were implemented in 2003 (Fig 4), and on this basis Komunitas Taboo received recognition as an Institution of Non-Formal Education within the National Education System (through Law no. 20, 2003). Later, they began to implement the Educational Equality programs, including the ‘C Package’ which awards a high school equivalency diploma. In 2009 the first generation graduated from this program, and in 2012 the third generation completed the program with all 14 students successfully passing the exam (Table 2). Such formal recognition helps motivate the students and provides them with a means of upward social mobility; however, it also reduces the autonomy of the Komunitas Taboo and the wider kampong community by integrating their ‘creative kampong’ activities into the state education system and other bureaucratic structures.
PKBM activities also include less formal programs, such as the community reading gardens which encourage children to learn informally (Fig. 3 point A), or the life skill courses such as jewelry craft workshops and female puppet show which develop practical creative skills and promote Sundanese culture (Fig. 4).

PKBM training also includes workshops on the marketing of art and craft products, under the auspices of the Entrepreneurship, Productive Business Community, and Business Study Group (KBU) programs. The products of craft workshops are marketed at festivals, and connections have also been established with distribution services which have resulted in orders from within the city and beyond. This positions the creative process as part of a general program of community improvement that includes the production of

Fig 4: (A) Workshop handcrafted Jewelry, (B) craft jewelry, (C) craft puppet show.
economically valuable products which is expected to develop into a sustainable domestic industry.

The arts and culture aspect of Komunitas Taboo fits into one element of the government’s PKBM program, namely the Arts Education, Culture and Sports category. However, for Komunitas Taboo itself art plays a much more central role in education. Taboo enacts art education not only in terms of painting or drawing on paper, but also in the more public medium of outdoor wall murals (Fig.5). Such wall murals are one example of the ways in which they seek to bring the art of painting into the public domain, so that it is no longer viewed as a rarefied and exclusive art but as something which everyone can appreciate and participate in. For the people of Kampong Dago Pojok, wall murals may simply be viewed as decorations or ornaments to beautify their homes and yards where they conduct their daily activities. However, more than that the mission of the murals in the kampong is to provide a unifying activity and sense of shared place and identity, a form of gotong royong (‘mutual assistance’) which promotes creative appreciation and a tangible marker of their ‘creative kampong’ community.

As part of their promotion of art education related to local culture, which in Dago Pojok is primarily Sundanese culture, Komunitas Taboo has brought back traditional forms of Sundanese music which have long been dormant. This includes traditional instruments such as calung, gamelan and drums which are employed as educational tools for the children and youth of the kampong. These are approached not only as a cultural heritage handed down from their ancestors, but also popularized as everyday instruments; indeed, many of these musical and performance arts have their origin in work tools which were later transformed into performing arts, such as the rice-pounding tools halu lisung (Fig 6). This demonstrates the creativity inherent in everyday life and productive activities, while also reframing it as a ceremonial artistic performance which can generate different forms of creative value.
Fig 6: (A) Workshop uses percussion and gamelan music instrument, (B) Playing music with Calung, (C) show the process used lisung halu to pound rice.

Similarly, sports activities are associated with traditional Sundanese games and tools, which involve both individual and collective efforts—for example, Pinang climbing in which both individual exertion and cooperative support is necessary to secure the gifts (Fig. 7).

Fig 7: (A) Climbing Pinang, (B) Engrang, (C) Papadatian

Kampong children are also encouraged to make their own drawings and paintings on paper, which are then exhibited in the ‘Tea House’ Gallery (Fig 8). At the opening of this exhibition, local residents were encouraged to attend along with artists, academics, journalists, and the general public, thus not only providing the children with significant social recognition for their creative efforts, but also encouraging cross-community socializing, communication, and networking. It was hoped that this would contribute to new forms of creative collaboration in Kampong Dago Pojok.
2.3 Cross-community collaboration

Komunitas Taboo has also engaged in collaboration with other creative and activist communities in the city. For example, beginning in 2004 they began to organize some joint events with the Kolektif Balai Kota (also known as the Balkot Terror Project), a ‘Do It Yourself’ hardcore punk organizing collective (Martin-Iverson, 2011). Their first collaborative project was undertaken on Indonesian Independence Day, August 17, when it is customary for local communities to organize a neighborhood festival or party. Such events typically begin with a flag ceremony, followed by a variety of traditional competitions (tree-climbing, sack races, cracker-eating, and so on), with music and dance performances in the evening.

The previous day, Kolektif Balkot had held a gig at Babakan Siliwangi, at an underground art community established by Rahmat Jabaril, featuring the Australian ‘folk punk’ performer Steve Towson. Jabaril invited the Balkot activists to hold another performance for Towson in Kampong Dago Pojok, as part of their Independence Day festivities (Figure 9). These festivities blended traditional village arts and music with the artistic endeavors of Komunitas Taboo, and the ‘Western’ underground music of Steve Towson. There were also a range of other performances such as poetry reading, performance art, and an exhibition of visual art by local children. This event played an important role in transforming the relationship between Komunitas Taboo and the Kampong Dago Pojok in which it was located, stimulating further dialogue, mutual recognition and the development of creativity. The presence of Balkot youth activists and Steve Towson not only helped introduce local residents to new forms of ‘popular’ music, but also reinforced the idea that their own creative efforts were worthy of an external audience. This event, conceived as a local gathering and party with a performance aspect, became a very inspiring communal event and a stimulus for further creative activity in the kampong.
More broadly, the arts and creative sectors in Bandung have responded to the development of Kampong Dago Pojok as a ‘creative kampong’ with various proposals for joint activities (Fig 10, Fig 11). A basic form of collaboration is to make use of the kampong space for artistic performances or exhibitions, though some go beyond this to actively involve the local community in the creative process. This involves the transfer of knowledge from a variety of stakeholders with diverse disciplines towards the Kampong Dago Pojok community, but also in the other direction as the local community gains confidence in their own knowledge, skills, and creative potential. Such exchanges can also help to improve the standard of living in the neighborhood. Over time, Kampong Dago Pojok has managed to establish itself not only as a good place to host artistic activities, but as a creative and inspiring community that deserves recognition and engagement. In 2012, Dago Pojok received official recognition as a ‘creative kampong’, hosting a series of events as part of the ‘Bandung Creative’ festival in collaboration with Bandung Creative City Forum, Padjadjaran University and the City of Bandung (Fig.11 point B).
Over time, through their community art projects and role as a PKBM, Komunitas Taboo has succeeded in promoting Kampong Dago Pojok as a significant and well-known creative site within Bandung. This significance has been supported, disseminated, and documented through informal publications, word of mouth among journalists, academics, students, and local people, as well as in more formal media coverage (Fig 12), and was confirmed by its recognition as a ‘creative kampong’ in hosting the 2012 festival.

Fig.12: Newspaper coverage of Festival creative in kampong dago pojok, June 2012
2.4 Art and community activism

Komunitas Taboo was labeled as a ‘community activism’ project, and in its early stages it was characterized by forms of organization, decision-making processes and activities informed by an activist movement strategy of mass mobilization. However, after several years of operation members of the local community took on a more active role in the various programs. Local residents also began to modify the programs to suit their own needs, interests, and preferences, though they remain under the ‘supervision’ of Komunitas Taboo activists. Through knowledge transfer, discussion and collaboration, and with the increasing experience of locals and the activists’ growing understanding of the local community, Kampong Dago Pojok developed into a more open society in terms of education, culture, and economy.

This shift was also reflected in the aesthetics of Komunitas Taboo art projects; initially, their music, performance, visual and plastic arts were largely produced in modern styles, but gradually as the activist group and the local community opened to each other there was significant acculturation and hybridization, producing works that combine modern and traditional styles and methods. This fit with one of the main goals of Komunitas Taboo, which sought to develop Dago Pojok as a creative kampong which would be more open and progressive without abandoning traditional culture or local wisdom.

The activities of Komunitas Taboo express the dilemma of the activist artist, attempting to empower local communities while risking the establishment of disempowering relationships through their position as ‘outside’ experts. Such artists can be regarded as an extension of the public sphere into more concrete social relations. Indonesia has a long and tumultuous history of conflict over the role of art in society, associated with wider socio-political and ideological conflict. On the one side, an individualist and humanist current promoted the idea of ‘Art for Art’s Sake’, with aesthetic autonomy as an abstract value in and of itself (Bourdieu, 1996). Historically, in Indonesia this view was represented by the Manikebu group of anti-Communist artists who initially supported the New Order regime (Foulcher, 1994; Mohamad, 1989). Opposing them was the Institute of People’s Culture (Lekra), which sought to connect art directly to socio-political transformation through producing ‘Art for the People’. Lekra artists accused the ‘pure art’ proponents of promoting private, capitalist interests under the guise of artistic freedom. Lekra was part of the socialist movement under the auspices of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and as such was banned and violently suppressed following the tragedy of 1965 and the beginning of the New Order era.

This debate was renewed during the decline and fall of the New Order in the 1990s and 2000s, though they are not necessarily associated with identical political interests or movements (Prasetyo 2012). Komunitas Taboo is informed by the renewed tendency of ‘Art for the People’, but emphasizes local community empowerment rather than political revolution on a national level. Still, the artwork of Komunitas Taboo include provocative and challenging expressions of protest which are intended to provide political education to the Kampong Dago Pojok community. The local community has been constructed as an ‘urban village’, and rendered as passive observers of politics rather than political actors in their own right, mobilized only during elections when they are expected to act under the direction of established political authorities. Economic, social, and educational inequalities contribute to the position of kampong residents as spectators in the arena of politics, which extends to the social and economic development projects undertaken by government agencies and private industry.

Komunitas Taboo has employed visual art as a key part of their strategy of community engagement, serving to attract local interest and involvement while also developing their confidence in critical expression. They make use of art programs not only as a means of political expression and social critique, but also as a method of education and skills training with the goal of community empowerment. A visual approach has succeeded in encouraging local children to make use of the Taboo community library and participate in
educational programs. Art shows incorporating both modern and traditional Sundanese styles have also proved effective in breaking down barriers between the Taboo activists and the kampong community, opening up communication and understanding that bridges the cultural and social differences between them. Once this communication and trust has been established, Komunitas Taboo was able to organize to provide free education to local children who had been forced to drop out of school due to poverty. Not only does this provide a space for play and learning for the children, but there is also a ‘domino effect’ whereby educational progress is passed on to their parents, many of whom have minimal formal schooling themselves. Komunitas Taboo was also able to secure official recognition as a Community Learning Centre (PKBM), awarding diplomas including high school equivalency (Program C).

However, using art as the basis for community organizing and empowerment is not without its problems; art itself is a complex and contested field, not a neutral territory (Bourdieu, 1996; Eagleton, 1990:2). Art is often drawn into the commodity market and competition for status among artists, and there is no universal and independent standard of aesthetic value. Art that is initially viewed as repugnant may gradually become more accepted or even canonized. The Komunitas Taboo initially implemented their art program as a means to introduce and explain their social ideas to the people of Kampong Dago Pojok. However, over time their art practice changed from such singular individual form of personal expression to a more engaged and dialogic mode of public communication. The art itself became denser, richer, more humorous, reflective, and participatory, adapting to the community’s cultural framework, emotional texture, language, visual landscape, understanding of the past, shared feelings, sensibilities and local wisdom.

Art as a form of commodity production operates through an institutional infrastructure and selection mechanism that controls status, employment, and value (Bourdieu, 1996; Stallabrass, 2004). This also occurs in Komunitas Taboo, albeit on a much smaller scale, where particular members of the community have been legitimized as artists and actors, who perform with the approval of the founding activists. While such selection processes can facilitate efficient organization and quality work, it also contributes to the emergence of a hierarchy within the community. Thus, despite attempting to bridge the gap between a marginalized community and civil society, community art activism can also engage in forms of organization that replicate forms of inequality and domination within its own internal structures.

2.5 Dago Pojok as creative kampong

Florida (2002) identifies creativity as a driving force in regional economic growth and prosperity. However, the mechanism of this relationship is not widely understood. Knudsen et al (2003) have shown that innovative activity in a region is positively related to population density and the presence of creative-class workers. In this paper we present evidence that, while creative workers have served as a catalyst, it is the social solidarity and creative cooperation amongst non-specialist community members which has been the decisive factor in transforming Kampong Dago Pojok into a creative kampong, generating significant gains in prosperity according to local community values. Komunitas Taboo has established a creative ‘urban commons’ (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012:67-88) of shared value and non-commodified creative production, which fits into established local values of community cooperation.

This also ties into the role of the kampong itself as community space. Public space plays a key role in the formation of collective memory and identities, filtering, regulating, and knitting them together into a collective consensus (Kusno, 2009:36). Komunitas Taboo takes advantage of this communal ‘village hall’ space to insert its own community activist agenda into the collective imagination of the kampong. However, the self-image of kampong residents is also shaped by the position of the kampong as a marginal element in the city as a whole. Indonesian kampong communities are sidelined by the “modern vision” of urban development—as epitomized by Bandung’s ‘creative city’ agenda—and through this marginal position they
play an important role in establishing a framework for the city to appear ‘modern’ (Kusno, 2009:60). Kampong Dago Pojok is administratively and spatially incorporated into the city of Bandung, but ideologically, economically, and socially it is pushed to the margins and excluded, while its inhabitants are left hoping for legitimacy through being ‘developed’. However, in practice development projects further reduce the status of the kampong, and ‘for those who want to have a middle-class status, the best strategy is out of the village’ (Dick, 1990:67). To the extent that the kampong itself becomes a modern, urban and ‘middle-class’ location, poorer ‘kampungan’ residents are pushed out.

3. Conclusion

Through community art, education and activism, Komunitas Taboo has developed Kampong Dago Pojok into a ‘creative kampong’ in which local residents are actively engaged with creative expressions of local culture. Through encouraging a general environment of creative expression, they are empowered to harness local social, cultural, and economic resources to improve their own lives, while also communicating and collaborating with diverse other social groups. Not only does this provide a direct social and economic benefit to local residents, while transforming the kampong as a physical space, but it has also established a new atmosphere of openness, confidence, and solidarity which has transformed social life in the community. Taboo has played a key role as a facilitator, communicator, collaborator, and negotiator, while also transforming the mindset and self-image of the community. However, in assuming this role Taboo activists also contribute to the construction of a dichotomy between ‘expert’ artists and activists on the one hand and ‘ordinary’ community members on the other.

There is also the risk that such creative community development will be contained as a form of alienated labor within a spatially and economically delineated ‘creative sector’, thus undermining the goal of community empowerment and borderless creativity (Latuconsina, 2010). Indeed, investing in creative ‘human capital’ may be regarded as a cheaper substitute for the substantial and long-term investment in urban services and infrastructure which is required for real social equality and sustainable urban development.

Nevertheless, Komunitas Taboo has made significance gains in empowering the Dago Pojok community to become more confident, independent, open, critical, and creative. They have overcome significant challenges to do so, including the vertical challenges associated with the marginalization of the kampong within the Dago region even as it developed as an important location within Bandung as a ‘creative city’ as well as the horizontal challenges relating to a lack of communication among kampong residents and a passive attitude to politics and social change. Komunitas Taboo helped the local community to realize their own powers of creativity—to recognize that through their everyday lives they are engaged in acts of social creativity and that they can take charge of this power to express themselves in effective action for the benefit of society (Bottomore, 1966). Their own artistic traditions were recovered from a state of empty ceremony to become vital and creative parts of the social life of the community.

However, the development of the neighborhood as a ‘creative kampong’ also brings with it the risk of further dispossession and alienation, especially if it is subsumed into the neoliberal ‘creative city’ project. There is a risk that a minority of Komunitas Taboo activists will be viewed as representing the wider community, acting and speaking on their behalf rather than merely facilitating their self-activity. Moreover, creative development may lead to the loss of public space in the kampong. As the neighborhood becomes known as a creative and vibrant site, and thus a desirable residential location and tourist destination, land and rent prices can be driven up, displacing previous residents. Should the creative activities be commodified, local residents will be increasingly excluded or reduced to devalued forms of service labor supporting the creative work. As a result, the cultural traditions and community organization that helped establish Dago Pojok as a ‘creative kampong’ may also be eroded or lost.
Historically, the development of the wider Dago area saw Dago Pojok degraded into an ‘urban village’ as local residents could not afford to access the education, entertainment and commercial activities. The liberalization of the urban economy emphasized competition, monetary wealth, and privatized forms of entrepreneurial enterprise. This is also the case with much of the ‘creative city’ development, albeit with a significant role for the state in facilitating and promoting such development.

It is thus necessary for social control over creative development to be invested in the kampong community itself—not as a ‘return to tradition’ but rather in a way which is adapted to the changing times. This does not mean a simple confrontation with state power, as contemporary forms of power and control are located in flexible forms of discipline and self-discipline (Foucault, 1977). In the case of Kampong Dago Pojok, power flows through the role of the Komunitas Taboo and their networking activities with various communities seeking to develop new forms of creativity and sociality. This kind of power can be exploited and abstracted away from the local community; however, it also relies on the existing power of local people to actively engage in creative and autonomous forms of social networking and collaborative production (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 2009).

The ‘creative city’ is thus both an opportunity and a threat for the development of an independent ‘creative kampong’ in Dago Pojok. Komunitas Taboo provides space, expertise, and a variety of activities for the education and cultural development of the local community, contributing significantly to the establishment of Dago Pojok as a ‘creative kampong’ and helping to improve the standard of living. However, by engaging in the discourse and institutions associated with the creative city, this also opens the local community up to forms of exploitation, exclusion, and subordination associated with the neoliberal market and the disciplinary state. To resist such forms of appropriation, the kampong community must reassert its own democratic self-authority, cooperative practices and its ‘creative commons’ of shared value.

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