5th Arte Polis International Conference and Workshop – “Reflections on Creativity: Public Engagement and The Making of Place”, Arte-Polis 5, 8-9 August 2014, Bandung, Indonesia

“Who is the Society?”: A Critical Look on the Constituent of Creative-Community through Artepolis Papers 2006-2012

Indah Widiastuti

Department of Architecture, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract

The bi-annual International Conference Arte-Polis in Bandung Indonesia has been representing an academic venue for the discourse of creative culture, creative city, creative industry and creative community since 2006. This of this paper is to reflexively examine the constituent of “creative community, in Indonesia context. This paper explored the assumption about society and their nature of involvement by reading the Artepolis papers collection as published in the proceeding of Artepolis 1 (2006), 2 (2008), 3 (2010) and 4 (2012). The object of study is the selected papers written by Indonesian authors. Overall the reading and examinations concluded that the notion of the creative community varied and proved deviations or differentiation from the original reference - Creative Class. At last, there were three kind of understanding identified in the text of Artepolis: Creative Class, Creative Milieu, and Creative Survivor.

Keywords: creative class; creative milieu; creative survivor; informal sector

1. Introduction

The International Conference Arte-Polis - or in this paper will be shortened as Artepolis - in Bandung Indonesia has been a bi-annual platform of discussion about Creative Community and Place-Making since 2006. This paper is written based on a study that explores the nature of society in the context of creative-community in Indonesia through papers published in the Artepolis paper proceedings. This study is meant to explore how far it may have deviated from the original concept of Creative Class as coined by Richard Florida. Although attended by never less
than 20 countries all over the world, majority of discussions has been dominated by topics from Indonesian and written by Indonesian authors. As well, its positions in Indonesia and being convened by an Architecture Program in Institute of Technology Bandung (ITB) are considered to give particular context, such as emphasize on place-making, city and other urban situation. The object of study are texts about creative-community that is derived from reading process in papers published in the proceedings of the five sequential conference of Arte-Polis first (2006), second (2008), third (2010), and fourth (2012).

It is important to state firstly that the notion of “creative class” as conceptualized by Richard Florida, is associated with a social class identified as skilled, educated and hip. They are said to include corporate executives or other traditional elites, paying to appeal to the creative industry while its gain is assumed to produce a trickle-down effect, generating widespread urban revival (Kotkin, 2013). The creative people is described by Florida as they who prefer places “that was diverse, tolerant and open to new idea”, and the region has the presence and concentration of creative capital which potentially lead to higher rates of innovation, high-technology business formation, job generation and economic growth” (Florida, 2001). However, a preliminary look at the Artepolis papers indicates that most papers published in proceedings contain assumption of a social system that does not necessarily accord with Floridian context. And mostly these deviations are found in papers written by Indonesian authors.

The analytical frame for exploring the “creative-community” is based on Anthony Giddens’s critical perspective that he utilized to discuss the emergence systems that followed Modernism or even Postmodernism, like “information society” and "consumer society". A preliminary look at the papers shows that although the concept creative class, creative culture, and creative industry has been each a phrase, but many Artepolis papers implied that the authors perceive it as literally two separated words - ‘creative’ and ‘class' - while emphasizing more to the words creativity and culture. Whether these situations are caused by limited understanding the theory of Creative Class by the authors or not, the Artepolis has factually represented a way the creative-community is academically discussed. Indeed, conceptual deviations and diversification of the creative class and perceptions to it is also proved by various critiques of the discourse. The pros and cons on Creative Class discourse mostly question the contributions of the concept for the rest of community or people outside the circle of a creative class. Jeanes and De Cock (2005), criticize that creativity is more of an ideology than a concept; or that creativity is a limited concept in the discourse a mode of reproduction of capital. Florida himself in Joel Kotkin article in New Geography com admitted that the benefits of appealing to the creative class accrue largely to its members—and do little to make anyone else any better off.” As well, other critiques on creative class questions the constituency class comparing to other social units in societies.

2. Method

The first step is done by examining the approximately 500 paper topics from where various perspectives about “society” are gained. Each paper is considered to contain text about creative community. The selections see the texts that expose or reflect practical experiences or best practices about creative community, creative industry, creative culture and creative class, smart city, and creative economy, not theoretical or abstract discourse, and it yield only 213 selected papers. Second step, the textual analysis is done on selected papers based on conceptual property of “society” according to Anthony Giddens. Gidden’s conceptualized two poles perceptions of society within the frame of Modernity and industrial society: as social association, or social clustering which develop values following the terms of labor division and moral order created by the industrial system and industrial society. Industrial society refer to the core machine of industrialized society (Giddens, 1990), whose operation and the following apparatus is seen to be the hidden ground of the moral order and labor divisions as described in social association. Social association and industrial society become two conceptual poles of perceptions where the capitalistic order pendulum is swinging in-between the two poles. Between these poles, the various native of creative-community or perception toward creative class is defined— whether it would swing closer to the definition of social association pole or industrial society pole.

In the second step, the texts about creative-community compiled from the selected papers are examined by means several principles derived from the social theory of Giddens. First principle is the “concept of society” which is examined in aspects of social systems and its localized context, circulating media, sphere of time-space-movement, knowledge productions and its power of language. Second principle is “societal regulating principles” that is
examined in aspects of an economic mechanism, bureaucracy, and innovative outcomes. Examinations of the property would provide explanations on the internal structure of the text that potentially explains the texts closer to a concept of “social association” or “industrial society”. Out of 213 papers, 156 papers are examinable. The data will be tabulated statistically and from it generalized conclusions is derived.

3. Analysis: Three texts about Creative-Communities

The first-step examinations showed that the common idea about creative-community in Artepolis papers since 2006-2012 does not always accord to the original reference to Creative Class. Two texts are revealed categories of the first texts of creative-community are defined as a creative class, as Richard Florida conceptualized. Here the creative class texts constitute of society that is identified as: 1) initiators which possibly appear as: investors, entrepreneur, government counterpart for spatial and economic planning; 2) consumers which is characterized their power of spending and commodification, manifest in lifestyle and branding; and 3) users which is functional consumers.

The second category of texts about creative-community is the one that does not follow the characters of a creative class—the otherness of the creative class texts-but their equal proportion of amounts prove their significance. From this texts the constituent of society could be identified as: 1) subculture with special characters of behavior, needs, limitations, expression and spatial emergences in urban space and situation such as gender and informal sectors; 2) community or people that due to their problems and lack of power and formal education and practical skill are normatively subject to empowerment; 3) inhabitants and development initiators of Urban Kampung or vernacular Kampung; 4) people involved in informal sectors and informal living; 5) participants in heritage activities (renovations, restorations, thematic development); 6) sporadic participants who are actively engaging in the shaping of environment and participating in planning, design, public art, social creativity for survival, survival collaboration with government; and 7) self-organized local and indigenous community which generate public happening urban conviviality.

The second category of text mentioned above does not take similar regulating principles as assumed in a creative class. The texts do not all necessarily emphasize significance of certain concentration of creative capital to be projected for higher rates of innovation, high-technology business formation, job generation and economic growth”. Most of the texts narrate or appreciating the power of place-making, indigenous or local activities, venue culturally, psychologically and at least economic potential possible to be projected. The characters are close to the concept of “creative milieu” by Mike Douglas (2013). It describes vernacular space or spatial-convivial manifestation of a local community engaging in vernacular economic activities, formally or informally, tangible or intangible. Douglas argued that this is a common and unique phenomenon in Asia, which is currently under threats by the flourishing neoliberalism. He took an example of the Warung concept that is described as local shops phenomenon in Indonesia being accrued by minimarket these days. Creative Milieu is in this paper taken to label this second category of text about creative-community—the Creative Milieu text.

However, authors find further deterrioralized context within the text of creative milieu that could be independently segmented and identified with specific characters. This text includes informal economy and its spatial projections in urban space. The numbers of papers bringing cases of urban informality, such as informal sector, urban informality, and informal economy activities, also appears almost 15% of the papers. Mostly the constituent of society is here normatively considered to require empowerment program. The text of informality does not only bring the issues of poverty, but also an emergence of systems that bracket informal sectors, poverty and other grassroots economy as one text category. Keith Hart mentioned that informal economy activities are not always simple independent fragments of activities and enterprises. It can be systematized, institutionalized and complex activities (Cross, 1994 in Widiastuti, 2006) that is possible subject to consumerism and symbolic interplay for capitalistic purposes. As a whole, they are more of texts about ordinary people trying to survive in daily life by using any means possible even by encroaching public realm. Author takes freedom to tentative label this category as Creative Survivor.

As a whole, there are three categories of texts about creative-community identified from the Artepolis papers 1, 2, 3 and 4: a creative class, creative milieu, and creative survivors. From overall tabulation, approximately 43% texts
are faithful to the assumption of a creative class; 43%, creative milieu and 14%, creative survivor. The fifty-fifty
distributions of creative milieu and creative class are relatively constant except at Arte-Polis 2nd, where the
percentage of texts about creative milieu reached about 56% while creative class only 20%. It may correlated with
the conference theme that put emphasize on discourse of community – Creative Community. The result of trend
analysis indicates a preference that the texts about creative-community in Indonesia by Indonesian authors mostly
refer to independent narrative about local/ indigenous community who creatively maneuver their environment and
economy and consequently produce unique set of locality and place-making. It could not be easily framed with
Creative Class definition, because they don’t have any assumption of any industrial and human capital resource in
the narrative.

It is interesting to note too that almost of all foreign authors coming from Southeast Asia, Asia and Non-Asian
countries wrote the papers with assumption of societies that show an awareness of the main reference of Florida
while Indonesian authors concentrate more on free interpretation of creativity as take place in grass root.

4. Discussion

However, the three different texts identified above could not be easily framed discretely. In an urban situation,
they shape one another and yield a complex textual assemblage altogether ranging from the informal economy to a
cultural industry, from traditional to a new economy. With regards to the discourse of a creative class, the
segmentations of texts in Artepolis papers prove emergences of definition of society that is deteroterrialized from
the concepts of a creative class.

If the Floridian defined creative class, creative industry, and creative community as initial territorality. The
majority of Indonesian texts showed different framing or deteritorialization from the concept of a creative class.
Territoriality here is understood in Deleuzian term, as a “body of the concept”. In Deleuzian perspective,
territoriality is identified when its constituents can show “territorialized” effect or “hefted “behavior. And they are
identified as “creative milieu” and “creative survivors”. The phenomena of industrial urban village (kampung kota)
and informal sectors has been frequent thematic texts that appeared in serial Artepolis. The texts narrated resilient,
agile, unique, populist, and enterprise characters that brought to the city spatially-creative expression and
coviviality. The following is results of the analysis of the concept of a creative-community using the property
concept of society and the regulating principles. It is the result of the second step of the analysis that extracts the
social operation of each text of the three texts of creative-communities so as to understand the nature of its
formation.

4.1. Creative class texts

The character of a creative-community, which is described as a creative class in Artepolis papers, includes some
actors. The first is inventors or creative people who engaged in ideas, innovate and develop system systematically or
sporadically for entrepreneurship purposes or survival, that at the end produced media innovations, social and
environmental activities, local entrepreneurship like distro, cafe knowledge generations, social mobilization for
improving quality of life. They constitute 28% of creative-community of the creative class text category. The second
that covers 24% is pure investors and business actors whose economic scheme does not necessarily relate to a
concept of creative culture, but pure business and industry. The third is people or society that acts as consumers and
users in urban spaces. Altogether they constitute 23%. The nearly equal percentage of investors and users/consumers
implied that the text about the creative class is mainly built in paradigm of “consumer culture”. It leaves the rest
category of communities outside this circle that is subculture, informal society, powerless people, villages or
kampung people and. Their contribution to heritage initiative and festival is still not necessarily high, making a sum
of only 5%.

The economic mechanism principles are mainly creative industry run by private investors supported by state
initiatives. There is no innovation identified with regards to specific systematic innovation. The role of a state
seems to be less. The assumed system of bureaucracy implied in texts is dominated by private-partnership followed
by some active communities.
The major concept of creative-community in creative class texts is a social system that is led by industry. Secondary to it are enterprises run by local people or ethnic and remote communities such as kampung. Social media, internet lifestyle, and socialite are the dominant circulating media of the innovations and programs. Place-making operating with the power of collective memory makes secondary importance as circulating media. City is the main sphere of time and space movement, from where it is extendable to wider and global sphere. There is no specific knowledge production. The power of language tends to lay on market and branding. Culture and knowledge come second to it. It is concluded that Economic profit is the dominant operations in texts about the creative class in Indonesia, more dominant than ideal cultural or educative motif.

4.2. Creative milieu text

The text about creative-community, which is defined in Creative Milieu, are dominated extremely by creative people and communities who engaged in designing or harnessing systems of place-making and entrepreneurship or survival. They demonstrate narratives about social and environmental activities, social programs, and environmental upgrading to sustain local entrepreneurship, knowledge generations about locality, empowerments, social mobilization for improving quality of life, local place-making and small medium enterprise which covers distros and local cafes. They constitute 43% of the Creative Milieu text. The business actors cover only 10% that prove little contribution from business initiative in terms of industry.

The economic mechanism and bureaucracy implied in the text mainly center in local communities, such as local-ethnics, local academic society, street artists, publishers, schools, and distros. It is facilitated by states through a common channel in a form of local government initiatives and local government–private enterprise. Nevertheless what is imminent in this creative milieu is the cultural theme like indigenous settlement, commodification of traditional culture, the role of heritage city, alun-alun (traditional Javanese city square) and heritage streets, heritage and economy establishment and place-making. Kampung appeared as significant terms, recurrently discussed, as kampung industri (urban industrial village), kampung wisata (village tourism), creative kampung, or heritage kampung. People power and people spirits are the strong regulating principles, unnecessarily connected to the construct of a creative class and paradigm of cultural industry.

Aspects that is dominant in endorsing the development of the creative milieu is the communal power of place-making and well-rooted ethnic people as mobilizer of the object of place-making itself. They constitute 37%. Second to it are the community units engaging in media community, socialite, artists and publishers constituting 23%. They mainly contribute in inventing contemporary media to preserve and distribute the ideas and socialite as their consumers. The time space of movement mainly is laid on unit of city or villages or any special locality. Mostly the ideas circulate through virtual media and collective memory of place-making as imminent in public daily life. It proves that city as a cultural-spatial unit is suitable scale sufficient to trigger public engagement.

Nevertheless, it is observed that there is still less solid, specific systems of knowledge production that could be directed with regards to creative cultural from it. Most endeavors are still individual initiator as a group of people or individual. State interaction is mostly brought as a wish to be a concept. Culture seems to be more as romanticized ideas to be invested for commercial purposes. The power of language that manifest still appear to be market and branding that again prove that the commercial purposes are still dominant, overcoming the cultural and educational motifs.

4.3. Creative survivor text

The main text of creative-community, as defined as creative survivors, is dominated by informal sectors or informal economy to 26%. Secondarily to it is a subculture, local people in the area and the active middle class, each covering 15%. It should be clarified here that the 15% middle class that is active here are not only consumers, but also activists and NGOs who actively promotes empowerment or designers that initiate open-source system. It is interesting that among this text of empowerment there is also a text about private sectors pursuing informal economy system and takes it as their mode of commerce. The issues about informal society under this text are exposed as unique urban situations in Indonesia.
Seeing the percentage, it seems that there is no specific characters for this category except that that their economic mechanism is said to be dominated by the coexistence between informal system (36%) and industry (32%) while the role of state is only 14%, which means it is tentatively regarded as consequences of cultural industry out of the boundary mechanism of state. They coexist with each other in a way that industry also utilizes the symbolic set of informality to simulate sense locality to stimulate market and commodification.

The aspect of informality turns out to be a solid social system occupying almost 39%, and second to it is independent community (22%) that is active as investors or associates with the informal sectors. Informality reveals major effect of knowledge production which is shown by various discussions of strategies that explain their resilience and management to keep up in the urban space. They also have a power of language that is visually unique, and referred by media people (22%) and apparently utilized by commercial sectors as branding market. There are no circulating media as an informal economy never requires that, only networks of crowds of people and supply-demand and chances to make it possible. An informal sector operates in locality scales, but its networks could spread to a wider area, to city or wider than it or even national. Their spatial body is an amoeboid. The knowledge power of informal activities is massive, it shows 48% that means that within informality and informal economy laid the development of strategies, knowledge making and systemic maintenance that is nevertheless ugly, but solid.

Each positioning of the social system concepts and their regulating principle described above is not rigidly segmented, each is an open assemblage system with varying “line of flights” that blur the boundary between the creative-community, creative class, creative community and creative survivor. The acceptance of them by each other depended on a degree of tolerance. Practically indeed the cross-definition among a creative class, creative milieu, and creative survivor communities are also there.

5. Discussion

The constitution of creative-community, as profiled in the texts of Artepolis, shows differentiation from the concept of a creative class as defined by Florida to various local perceptions about creative-community. The understanding of creative communities appear in Artepolis texts generally prove that the notion of creativity is closer to “social association” to value and ideology that follow the concept of creative culture and cultural industry rather than an outcome of a systematic “industrial society” system. The ideas about creative-community have not yet implied a society with systematic knowledge production, documentation and preservation methods. The main engine is economy and a global economy where cultural or educational purposes always appear second or third to it. People engaging in it may not necessarily appear ideally as vibrant, hip and tolerant, as idealized by Florida but more competitors in a neoliberalism jungle.

Cultural richness is not an asset if the maintenance, preservation and knowledge development system is not strong. Borrowing the Deleuzian terms, to some extent the discourse of Creativity manifested in Artepolis texts prove to be “an allusion of transcendence”. What is the immanence that has been so far built the texts of creative communities in Indonesian? Is it the community or the cultural system of the community? Is it an outside economy system alien to the community?

The analysis concludes that an economic motive still dominate the intention of a creative class in Indonesia. Given the various discussions on cultural diversity and the power of place-making, another question appears: what is the meaning of culture for the Indonesian people in terms of economic development, is it an enabler? A driver? Or a motivation? Or mere as commodity? The poor knowledge production and dominating power language of market and branding embedded in the text shows that the sustainability of culture in the industry and the community could be at risk. In the situation where system of cultural sustenance and knowledge production is lacking, the discourse of creative culture could be only means to legitimate irresponsible encroachments of value for industrial purpose, which at the end potentially degrades the culture and the community itself.

On the contrary, the discussion about informality and Kampung development could raise a question whether an informal economy is an original creative and powerful underground economic system? It is narrated in many papers how informal economy proves to be resilient amidst the uncertainty of economic situation in the nation. It is obvious from the text that informal economy is the major resilient economic system in Indonesia. It is observable through many texts that describe its operations and various independent initiatives trying to enhance, empower and research
it. Their significance is also reflected through texts that express them as modes of exchanges that are also accrued by
the private sectors ranging from retail trade to multinational company, such as the acquisitions of pedestrians for
street hawking of phone cards stalls, and informal images for the designs of cafes.

Indeed, some informal economy persisting for survival purposes tend to show radical sporadic behavior, multiple
and hardly normalized or homogenized acts. But if this would be the case, then their behavior is not different to
encroachment done by the global economy to the local economy. It is possible that the actual pendulum of a creative
community in Indonesia is between an informal economy, a local economy and a global economy.

References

Bell, J. (ND). Between Individualism and Socialism: Deleuze’s Micropolitics of Desire. Retrieved from March 20, 2013, from
http://www2.southeastern.edu/Academics/Faculty/jbell/micropolitics.pdf.
Deleuze, G, & Guatari, F. (2003). Anti-Oedipus Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Douglass, M. (2013). Creative Communities Versus the Cultural Economy – The Vernacular City as an Alternative to Globopolis in Asia. In Erb,
M. (Eds.), Working Papers (194). Singapore: Dept. of Sociology NUS.
Florida, R. (2003). The Rise of the Creative Class. Australia: Pluto Press.
Florida, R. (2002). The Rise of the Creative Class. Why cities without gays and rock bands are losing the economic development race. Retrieved from January 3, 2014, from http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0205.florida.html.
Giddens, A. (1990). The Consequences of Modernity. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Jeanes, E. L. and De Cock, C. (2005). Making the familiar strange: A Deleuzian Perspective on Creativity, Creativity and Innovation Management Community Workshop. Oxford, UK.
Kotkin, J. (2013). Richard Florida Concedes The Limits of The Creative Class. Retrieved from January 1, 2014, from http://www.newgeography.com/content/003575-richard-florida-concedes-limits-creative-class.
Oberman, R., Dobbs, R., Budiman, A., Thompson, F., Rosse, M. (2012). The archipelago economy: Unleashing Indonesia’s potential. New York: McKinsey Global Institute.
Proceeding International Conference Arte-Polis 1 – Creative Culture and the Making of Place, Department of Architecture, SAPPK, Institute of Technology Bandung, Bandung 21-22 July 2006.
Proceeding International Conference Arte-Polis 2 – Creative Communities and the Making of Place, Department of Architecture, SAPPK, Institute of Technology Bandung, Bandung, 8-10 August 2008.
Proceeding International Conference Arte-Polis 3 – Creative Collaboration and the Making of Place, Department of Architecture, SAPPK, Institute of Technology Bandung, Bandung, 22-24 August 2010.
Proceeding International Conference Arte-Polis 4 – Creative Connectivity and the Making of Place, Department of Architecture, SAPPK, Institute of Technology Bandung, Bandung, 5-7 July 2012.
Widiastuti, I. (2006). Informality in Urban Space as Identity-Creating Image of Bandung City as “Heaven of Food and Shopping, International Conference Arte-Polis Proceeding on July 2006, ITB, Bandung.