

Transformation of Development Policy on Informal Settlements

—From the riverbank in Yogyakarta, Indonesia—

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Place of fieldwork: Indonesia

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- Research background

A total of 54% of the world's population lives in urban areas. In the case of Indonesia, more than 50% of its population of 24 million lives in cities (UN 2014). One of the negative impacts of urbanization is the occurrence of slums, which occupy waterfronts and vacant lots. Urban poor cannot get access to affordable housing and end up living in marginalized parts of cities. It is accepted by governments and many academics that economic growth associated with the export of manufactured goods has led to decreased poverty levels and an improvement in shelter conditions of all sectors of society (Shatkin2004). However, remaining informal settlements often are displaced subsequently in the name of urban development or mega projects. Mass eviction makes development more complicated and becomes a source of conflict.

- Research purpose and aim

The aim of this study is to examine the transformation of urban development and its impacts on informal settlements in Indonesia. Despite international efforts by the UN and lending organizations from the 1980s, efforts to mitigate negative impacts of development on informal settlements have been discarded. For example, settlements that had to move were not provided with compensation for their displacement or to purchase alternative sites. In the case of Indonesia, many such incidents were reported in the authoritarian era of President Suharto. After the ending of the Suharto regime in 1990s, the government implemented political reform. Some previous research mentions the beginnings of a civil society movement at the time. However, such researches did not confirm whether the urban policy on informal settlements with ambiguous land tenure had changed.

I have chosen the informal settlements on the riverbanks in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, as a research site. There are literatures on civil society in Yogyakarta but much of it fails to examine how government has introduced policies on them after the political reform.

- Results and achievements of fieldwork

For this fieldwork, I took an internship in a local NGO for 40 days. Then, I conducted a research in some informal settlements, called *kampung* in Indonesian, with local staff. Through my internship, I investigated the

changes of land use and introduction of public infrastructure of the *kampung*. One of my findings was that settlements occupying riverbank have access to public services even they are still under the threat of displacement because of lack of land title. As a progress report of internship, I gave a presentation and submitted a report to the NGO office.

In addition, I sought to get information from stakeholders in urban policy formulation. I conducted interviews in some local government offices, including the Regional Development Planning Agency (BAPPEDA) and the Environmental Agency (BLH), and participated in the activities of the Community Based Organization (CBO) in the Code River in Yogyakarta. There are three new insights that I have gained through the fieldwork:

1. The numbers of violent development methods that have caused conflict between government and informal settlements on riverbanks have decreased. As a result, there is an increased importance for the CBO and NGOs to act as facilitators in implementing and communicating projects on the Code River.
2. There remains a large amount of garbage and water pollution in the Code Rivers even though a lot of cleaning projects have been carried out. Therefore, local government needs to engage with riverbank settlements to continue with the cleaning of the river.
3. There is a development issue between developers and others in the private sector and riverbank settlements because increasing number of private sector entities have expropriated land near rivers and built high-rise buildings. On the other hand, some settlements facing the threat of displacement have engaged in opposition actions.



Picture1. A *kampung*, research site near the Code River, Yogyakarta



Picture2. Progress report on the internship with a local NGO

- Implications and impacts on future research

What emerged from the review is that I could not spare the time for an academic exchange with local researchers. This is because I spent a lot of time participating in internship and conducting interviews in local government offices. However, the experience of working on creating documents and giving presentations in Indonesian through the internship improved my language ability. For my next fieldwork, I aim to use some of my

time to communicate with local researchers and students who are committed to urban development issues in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.



Picture 1. Cleanup activity at the Code River, Yogyakarta

Citations

Shatkin, G. 2004. Planning to Forget: Informal Settlements as “Forgotten Places” in Globalising Metro Manila, *Urban Studies*, 41(12), pp. 2469-2484.

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