

Community practices and changes in the dynamics of urban governance: Analysis of Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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In the context of the decentralisation of policies initiated in 1999 in Indonesia, grassroots communities have slowly been able to get a stronger role in urban governance. Decentralisation has meant that local governments have more responsibilities in decision-making processes (albeit in many cases decentralisation has not been accompanied by a decentralisation of financial resources) and also encourage communities to take more active roles in urban governance. Some policies and programs have explicitly fostered community participation and community empowerment. Hence, new community organisations have appeared. They have different types of structures and relationships with governments. Formal and informal practices from community groups have become more significant in shaping everyday local politics and in creating (even if slowly) a significant change in the dynamics of urban governance.

This paper analyses community practices that have developed over the last five years in Yogyakarta Metropolitan Area aiming to sort out problems at the city scale. These problems include scarcity of water due to new developments, upgrading of slum areas and improvement of public spaces. The analysis of these practices help to understand the changes in the urban governance process. The paper argues that new alliances among stakeholders and renegotiation of power are fostering these changes in governance. This is explained (among other factors) by the higher visibility and recognition some community groups have achieved and the outcomes of their collective action. The construction of 'power within' community groups becomes critical to show visibility and to create new opportunities for negotiation practices and recognition of the importance of grassroots' power. This 'power within' is constructed through networking, social capital and people coming together with similar interests, needs and demands. This power triggers collective action and transformation.

However, the distribution of power is still greatly unbalanced, with community groups still having limited opportunities for participation and influencing policies. The question then is: What type of urban governance is promoted? One that is based on a democratic and participatory process, where there is more equity and sense of active citizenship, or a model still based on the government shaping everyday actions? These two approaches compete against each other in the eyes of the communities who struggle for transformation and a change in the status quo. The paper argues that in Indonesia two models of governance coexist from the communities' perspective: one horizontal and democratic and one vertical and from 'the top'.

The paper is based on primary qualitative data collected through a range of methods including in-depth interviews, field visits, meetings, observations and informal conversations over two years with members of community organisations, officers from local and provincial governments, local NGOs staff members and researchers from Yogyakarta in 2014-2015.

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Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The transgressive city: Comparative perspectives on governance and the possibilities of everyday life in the emerging global city” Mexico City, 21-23 July 2016. <http://rc21-mexico16.colmex.mx/index.php>