Research Article

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Friction in the Creative City

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Abstract: The Indonesian city of Bandung presents itself as an "emerging creative city." This raises the question of how an "emerging" creative city can attain realisation: *when* and *where* is the creative city accomplished? The formalisation of the creative city creates friction – to borrow the term from Tsing. This friction manifests in two ways. First, through its ontological opacity (what *is* the creative city?), Mould contrasts the "Creative City" (the mainstream understanding of the term) with the lowercase "creative city" (the more grounded, subversive understanding of the term). Second, through political contestation (*how* and *for whom* is the creative city?) which Peck and Theodore question through the notion of "fast policy," in dialogue with the notion of "slow policy." However, rather than being a dead end, this article argues that "friction" can repoliticise the creative city by challenging the depoliticisation that occurred through its formalisation.

Keywords: creative city, Bandung, Indonesia, fast policy, slow policy, creative economy, urban policy

In *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing explores processes of globalisation. At face value, she focuses on the tensions between deforestation and environmental activism in the Meratus mountains in South-East Kalimantan. But in fact, she connects the frontiers of resource extraction and environmental advocacy with Indonesia's role and place in the world, while equally focusing on the role the world plays in the Indonesian rainforest. In doing so, she develops a grounded theoretical perspective on both postcolonial Indonesia and the tensions that emerge as "friction" between formal policies and the contradictions they encounter through implementation and contestation.

In a brief chapter somewhere halfway through the book, she recounts the moment when, in 1955, the city of Bandung hosted the Asia-Africa Conference. Through this event, where independence activists and heads of newly independent states from across Africa and Asia met, Bandung became the symbol of the non-aligned movement in the context of Cold War geopolitics.

Tsing describes how a memorial postal stamp depicts a globe with only Africa and Asia as visible territories. In the foreground of the stamp, a group of people faces the globe, reaching to the future, as symbolised by the doves flying from the crowd to the globe. This scene captures the aspirations of "sovereignty and world peace" voiced by conference delegates and the people they represented (Tsing 84). Universal aspirations are a key tenet of her engagement with how problems and ideas have become *global*. They are however not merely global: The global and the local create friction as these universal aspirations encounter their practical achievement – however incomplete or failed. But global and local are not opposite extremes that we can simply juxtapose. They rather symbolise the tension between the abstract and the concrete. Tsing explains this friction through the metaphor of a bridge:

> The universal bridge to a global dream space still beckons to us. The bridge might take us out of our imagined isolation into a space of unity and transcendence: the whole world. We find ourselves like a man looking out from his parochial island toward the vast but hazy world of the mainland. The bridge of universal truths promises to take us there.

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> Yet we walk across that bridge, and we find ourselves, not everywhere, but somewhere in particular. Even if our bridge aims toward the most lofty universal truths – the insights of science, the freedom of individual rights, the possibility of wealth for all – we find ourselves hemmed in by the specificity of rules and practices, with their petty prejudices, unreasonable hierarchies, and cruel exclusions. We must make do, enmeshing our desires in the compromise of practical action. We become hardened, or, alternatively, we are overcome with grief and anger.
>
> The bridge we stepped off is not the bridge we stepped upon. Yet to cast away the memory of the first bridge denies desire. To pretend it is the same as the second bridge is the baldest lie of power. It is only in maintaining the friction between the two subjectively experienced bridges, the friction between aspiration and practical achievement, that a critical analysis of global connection is possible. (Tsing 85)

Bandung in the twenty-first century still remembers the *Asia-Africa Conference*. The museum that commemorates the event is located in the Art Deco building that hosted the conference. Its continued existence, more than six decades on, is a testament to the political moment that shaped the postcolonial imagination of many. But Bandung today has a wholly new set of aspirations of its own, quite distinct from the "non-aligned" Asia-Africa movement. Bandung's contemporary aspiration to become a "creative city" may be less grand than the hopes for sovereignty and world peace voiced in 1955, but it is not less global.

This raises the question of how an "emerging" creative city can attain realisation: *when* and *where* is the creative city accomplished? Is there a universal blueprint the city needs to resemble? Is there a common list of criteria that need to be met? Is there a formal recognition process? Or does it suffice to adopt a new city branding strategy? Perhaps most importantly, how do stakeholders navigate *friction* between universal aspirations and their practical achievement under the singular banner of the "creative city?"

While this article builds on the particular case of Bandung in Indonesia,[1] it raises more general questions about how *friction* surrounds the creative city, in both theory and practice. First, I question its ontological opacity (what *is* the creative city?) through the work of Oli Mould, who contrasts the uppercase "Creative City" (the mainstream understanding of the term) with the lowercase "creative city" (the more grounded, subversive understanding of the term). Second, I explore the political contestation (*how* and *for whom* is the creative city?) through Jamie Peck and Nic Theodore's notion of "fast policy," in dialogue with the notion of "slow policy" (De Beukelaer and O'Connor). Through an exploration of these areas of friction, I propose a theoretical framework to rethink what Andy Pratt calls the "cultural contradictions" of creative cities: Friction serves as the lens through which to understand the tensions between "the nature and the livelihood in the actually existing creative city" in contrast with "the more general rhetoric in favour of creative cities" (Pratt 124). However, rather than approaching this conflict as an analytical dead end or a source of insurmountable political or ideological conflict, I argue friction may repoliticise the creative city by challenging the depoliticisation that occurred through its formalisation, by making explicit that the "bridge we stepped off is not the bridge we stepped on" (Tsing 85). While I criticise Oli Mould's largely Western-centric analysis, Tsing's theorising is deeply grounded in extensive ethnographic work in Indonesia, as is the work of Peck and Theodore in cases in Mexico and Brazil. While their empirical work in these loci does not negate their standing as Western-based academics, the grounded theorisation of these issues in non-Western contexts challenges the implicit universalism of much social science. It is, indeed, by taking the empirical realities of non-Western contexts as worthy of theorisation, that we may make progress to decolonising knowledge production (Comaroff and Comaroff; Connell).

In conclusion, I argue that it is precisely the dual nature of the "creative city" as depoliticised *and* potentially political which gives the term its importance in Indonesia. My ethnographic fieldwork in Bandung suggests that creativity simultaneously refers to tradition, culture, religion, expression, and contestation, but does so without cultural or religious connotations, which allows artists, activists, politicians, and policy-makers to speak of culture, while bypassing the ethnic and political tensions that have increased in Indonesia in recent years (Diprose et al.; Hadiz and Robison).

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1 This article explores these questions based on policy analysis, expert interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, carried out in 2016 and 2017. All interview data below is anonymised, given the political sensitivity of interviewees' opinions. Claims made below without reference to interviews or the literature build on insights and observations derived from field notes.

An "Emerging" Creative City?

In 1955, Bandung became synonymous with the (proto-) postcolonial aspiration of sovereignty and world peace. In the early twenty-first century, Bandung's global dream space is the "creative economy," which encompasses the activities classified as "creative industries" that primarily cluster in and around "creative cities" (De Beukelaer and Spence; Hesmondhalgh). In its aspiration to become a "creative city," Bandung aims to cross another "universal bridge to a global dream space" (Tsing 85).

Since the 2000s, many post-industrial cities around the world have eagerly embraced the creative economy as the would-be driver of their aspired economic success, for "the prosperous utopian idyll of a Creative City is indeed an intoxicating vision for many urban governments" (Mould 3). Cities need strategies to compensate for rising unemployment, as manufacturing and industry have all but left Europe and North America in search of cheap labour and lax environmental regulation. Garment manufacturing is one such activity that has practically disappeared from the "West." Post-industrial, would-be creative cities started focusing on cultural and creative industries to retain economic activity in an attempt not to fall behind on cities that are home to "sweatshops in Asia" (Mould 27, see next section).

Interestingly, Bandung is one of these "sweatshops in Asia." It is one of many Asian cities with a history of garment manufacturing. A significant portion of its population works in this labour-intensive and under-waged industry, propped up by "modest fashion," one of Indonesia's key "creative economy" exports that caters to Muslims – thereby bridging design and manufacturing. But Bandung is also home to the *Institut Teknologi Bandung* (ITB), one of the country's first, and leading universities.[2] Bandung has, like many other places, eagerly embraced the *ekonomi kreatif* despite the discursive contradictions that emerged as the concept travelled rapidly around the globe (Kong; Prince; Wang). The exact meaning of "cultural" or "creative" industries – or, indeed the "ekonomi kreatif" – depends greatly on the time and place to which it is adapted (De Beukelaer).

Bandung is known as a "bottom-up" creative city. This narrative rests on the central role of the *Bandung Creative City Forum* (BCCF) as the civil society organisation instrumental in the city's adoption of "creative city" strategies (Aritenang; Cohen; Hermawati and Runiawati; Kim). In most cities – particularly those in the West, creative city policies are commonly part of top down, consultant-driven strategies (McGuigan), often spearheaded by private investors (Cohen; Peck), even if these strategies capitalise on existing "creative" networks. The "bottom-up" contestation of mainstream "Creative City" narratives is not unique (Borén and Young; Chang; Grodach and Silver; McLean), but the specific case of Bandung merits greater attention.

Bandung developed an interest in the creative industries through the British Council. Several Bandung-based "creatives" took part in their *Young Creative Entrepreneur of the Year* exchange, including Ridwan Kamil in 2006 and Gustaff Iskandar in 2007 (Jurriëns 181). This program introduced them to "creative industries" and "creative cities" across the UK. Afterwards, in 2008, they founded the BCCF to consolidate existing practices and initiatives through the fashionable policy language. The case of Bandung has been studied relatively widely (Aritenang; Cohen; Fahmi et al.; Martin-Iverson), though the present article adds to this body of literature as it aims to theorise tensions between the abstract ideal and the imperfect implementation of the creative city, using the city of Bandung as a case study. It does not purport to offer a universal theory, but rather an analytic counterpoint that can, *mutatis mutandis*, serve for further reflection on creative cities elsewhere in the world. In doing so, I aim to advance a grounded theoretical perspective on what the tensions between aspiration and implementation may mean for the future of the creative city more generally.

Despite claims regarding its unique bottom-up approach, Bandung's emergence as a creative city ties in with the influence and uptake of the discourse across Asia (Wang et al.) and the broader "synchronisation" of policy ideas and approaches around the world (see Alasuutari), with the help of "global experts" that

2 ITB was founded by the Dutch colonial government as the *Technische Hoogeschool te Bandoeng* in 1920, after it consolidated an existing settlement into *Gemeente Bandoeng* ('municipality of Bandung') in 1810.

embody the "universal aspirations" of which Tsing speaks. The "bottom up" perspective can harbour a manifold of ideological perspectives, including a push for "neoliberalisation from below" (Martin-Iverson 121). The founding of BCCF echoed the work of consultants promoting the city as locus of creativity (Florida; Landry; Landry and Bianchini), and ties it with the vast spread of "cultural capitals" and "creative cities" schemes around the world (Green). Despite the popular narrative of home-grown advocacy, there are clear institutional (British Council), consultant (Charles Landry), and academic influences (including ITB and foreign universities such as UC Berkeley, where Ridwan Kamil graduated).

Dan Cohen argues that these influences matter because BCCF's discourse does not necessarily reveal the underlying influences and ideological nuances (Cohen 35). Indeed, these influences did not encounter a creative *tabula rasa*: The city has long been at the forefront of music, independent video art, design, and fine art (Jurriëns; Martin-Iverson). Because of this, BCCF reflects the city's history, while strategically aligning their objectives with both the Indonesian government and international organisations, the British Council in particular (Cohen 33–34).

A key moment in Bandung's history as an "emerging" creative city was the election of Ridwan "Emil" Kamil, BCCF's first director, as its Mayor in 2013. The transition from civil society to government allowed him to bring along BCCF's ideas into the city administration. This helped him make significant changes to the appearance of the city. But living up to expectations of Bandung's "creatives" proved difficult, as their aspirations are many and diverse (see "*Creative City" versus "creative city" below*). This is a key moment where Tsing's metaphorical bridge was crossed, creating friction between those, like Ridwan Kamil, who became subject to the practical constraints of city administration and those, like many BCCF members, who remained committed to idealistic aspirations.

The friction between the aspirations of Bandung's "emerging" creative city future and the practical constraints that hamper their practical achievement was predictable and inevitable. But rather than seeing the inevitable imperfection of the "creative city" implementation as a failure, I take it as a starting point to explore tensions concerning the on-going implementation of the strategy.

"Creative City" Versus "creative city"

In his book *Urban Subversion and the Creative City*, geographer Oli Mould distinguishes two parallel but contradictory uses of the creative city discourse. On one hand, the uppercase "Creative City," embraced by city governments and consultants when pursuing strategies to make cities "creative" serves as "shorthand for the capitalistic, paradigmatic (bordering on dogmatic) and meta-narrative view of how creativity can be used to economically stimulate and develop the city" (Mould 5). On the other hand, the lowercase "creative city," which many "creatives" favour, builds on the way their cities work, and thereby "embraces experimental and creative social interaction, and broadens our usage of urban functions, not constricts them, producing more heterogeneous and less homogeneous urban spaces [...] a city where being creative is the very act of citizenship" (Mould 5).

This distinction is useful because it highlights the intrinsic incommensurability of perspectives on the creative city, even if Mould's dichotomy is not as binary or straightforward in practice. At face value, the opposition may seem to map onto the city of Bandung, where the local government has embraced the uppercase "Creative City" script, while BCCF embodies the lowercase "creative city." The city focuses on the dominant creative city discourse, by playing out the commercial advantages of being an appealing city (primarily for domestic tourists), while focusing on a range of cosmetic changes that benefit tourism and consumption. BCCF, in contrast, connects a range of "creatives" from across the city and a range of creative practices, prioritising tangible improvements for its residents. However, this neat distinction does not do justice to the prevalent contradictions across these approaches, much like juxtaposing the music scene in Bandung as being either "mainstream" or "underground" does not capture the layered tensions and contradictions in the city either (Martin-Iverson).

One of the principal issues is that Mould discusses the rise of the (upper-case) Creative City almost exclusively in the context of the Anglophone West. While arguing that culture has become a "competitive tool" in the global rivalry between cities, he fails to engage with the ways in which cities across the world are pursuing such strategies:

> Deindustrialisation, the rise of BRIC countries and the availability of cheap labour in sweat shops in Asia, Africa and South America, meant that for Western nations, the investment in cultural assets was not only desirable, it was essential for the maintenance of economic global dominance. (Mould 27)

He seems to suggest that the aim for such dominance is the prerogative of Western countries. This is of course misguided. There is no lack of ambition in many cities that house sweatshops (including Bandung) to become globally competitive. Due to rapid urbanisation, predominantly in the "Global South," the aim of non-Western cities to become (recognised as) creative cities challenges Mould's position. This is significant beyond the mere empirical scope of his work, because cities like Bandung create additional dimensions to the friction between the uppercase and lowercase creative cities. The subversive nature of the lowercase "creative city" in Bandung lies not so much in the presence of "subversive" artists (even though they do most certainly exist in the city). The subversion of the creative city "script" lies mainly in providing unsolicited civil society input in decentralised policymaking (at the city level), rather than in the art forms and subcultures practiced in the city.

During Ridwan Kamil's tenure, Bandung obtained recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Design in 2015. The *Cihampelas Walk*, an elevated walkway and open-air shopping district above Jalan Cihampelas, got built.[3] The newly built *Bandung Creative Hub* in the south-east of the city, on the corner of Jalan Laswi and Jalan Sukabumi, was opened in 2017 – forming a hopeful production-oriented counterpoint to other investments which focus on increasing consumption. And the City's motto changed from *Bandung Bermartabat* ("dignified Bandung") to *.bdg*, after BCCF unsuccessfully proposed this to Dada Rosoda, the city's previous Mayor. These are clear accomplishments of Bandung's emergence as an uppercase "Creative City," but they do conceal the envisaged changes that did not materialise.

"Creatives" in Bandung did not simply accept the shift away from BCCF's predominant focus on the lowercase "creative city." There was a growing concern over what activists thought *should* happen, and what the city government were *doing*. A key point of critique is the tension between the "beautification" of the city and the limited structural engagement with pressing issues such as transport, social inclusion, and rapidly rising real estate prices.

BCCF has founded (and continued) a series of weekly discussion nights on issues related to the creative city, and creative practice more broadly. These events happen on Wednesdays and are appropriately called "Rabuan," which derives from *Rabu*, "Wednesday" in Bahasa Indonesia. These Wednesday nights have created a public forum through which the lowercase "creative city" manages to get together, discuss, and debate. By turning to Mould's version of the subversive (lowercase) creative city, some activists started arguing for an even more ambitious agenda, if only to keep the city government on its toes. This resulted in the formulation of the Ten Principles of the Creative City in Indonesia. These principles were presented at the 2015 commemorative conference of the 1955 Asia Africa Conference; and it was the "Dasasila Bandung" principles that date back to 1955 that served as inspiration for the 2015 document:

[A Creative City is:]

1. [a] city of compassion…
2. [an] *inclusive* city…
3. [a] city that protects *human rights*…
4. [a] city that honours its *community's creativity*…
5. [a] city that grows together with *a sustainable environment*…

3 Bandung's garment manufacturing is tied up with *distros* ('factory outlets'), which are concentrated around Jalan Cihampelas (see Kim). What looks like mere 'beautification' of the city doubles as public investment in commercial areas that attract domestic tourists to come to Bandung.

6. [a] city that nurtures *historical wisdom* as well as to maintain a spirit of renewability to realise a better *future* for whole community.
7. [a] city that is managed *transparently*, *fairly*, and *honestly*…
8. [a] city that can meet the *basic needs* of the community…
9. [a] city that utilises *renewable energy*…
10. [a] city that is able to provide decent *public facilities*…

(Indonesia Creative City Forum, Bandung, 27 April 2015)

Reading these "Ten Principles," one wonders if Bandung's twenty-first century aspirations are really "less grand" (as I claimed in the introduction) than its 1955 aspirations, because the creative city is perhaps more ambitious and versatile than it seems. These principles use the uppercase "Creative City" as a vehicle for a set of universal aspirations that extend beyond its mainstream meaning. There is a further parallel with Tsing's argument: this kind of "radical politics [that] emerged as a utopian critique" resonates with environmental campaigning that, she claims, aimed to "raise political expectations" during the New Order regime, rather than actually attaining these grand ideals (Tsing 218). The repoliticisation of the "creative city" thus challenges the depoliticisation that occurred through its formalisation of the "Creative City."

Mould argues that the "creative city" could "rescue" the "Creative City" through the potential for resistance it carries. Indeed, when discussing the ten principles, one of the BCCF founders clarified that they serve to provide an ambitious normative agenda, rather than mere indicators (such as economic growth and employment in the sector). Indicators are however never an *a priori* way to measure "principles." Though principles dictate the focus of indicators, even if certain indicators (such as GDP) retain their popularity for political expediency (and often for the intellectual and methodological laziness they permit).

If we acknowledge that the creative city only exists as an abstract universal, or a "universal aspiration" as Tsing would have it, we can move beyond the dichotomy of the uppercase and lowercase creative cities. However, the transgression of incommensurable views on the creative city does not equate their resolution. Because while many cities may aspirationally appeal to the notion of the uppercase "Creative City" in their marketing and policy documents, activists may appeal to the notion of the lowercase "creative city" in rejection of the former. This creates a tension that downplays, rather than uses, the friction emerging from different normative viewpoints. But friction can be constructive as it could help us debate and articulate what the creative city ought to be. It forces us to address the tensions that emerge between copy-paste and indigenous ideas about the creative city. And it makes the need for negotiation of conflicting wants and needs more feasible.

The creative city is in effect a "global dream space" that we are looking towards, from our "parochial island" (Tsing 85). The creative city is, much like the globe I discussed in the introduction, a symbol for a very broad and complex set of objectives and ideals. This in itself is a challenge. But when we start crossing the "bridge of universal truths [that] promises to take us there […] we find ourselves hemmed in by the specificity of rules and practices, with their petty prejudices, unreasonable hierarchies, and cruel exclusions" (Tsing 85). But while Bandung's 1955 aspirations of sovereignty and global peace may have faded, its twenty-first century aspirations create friction in both its objectives ("Creative City" versus "creative city") and its implementation ("fast policy" versus "slow policy"). Indeed, the conceptual and ontological tensions around the status of the creative city cannot be disconnected from the "fast" and "slow" policy approaches that serve to implement these ideas.

"Fast Policy" Versus "Slow Policy"

In their book *Fast Policy: Experimental Statecraft at the Thresholds of Neoliberalism*, geographers Peck and Theodore explored two examples of fast policy: "conditional cash transfers" and "participatory budgeting." These policies emerged in Mexico and Brazil, respectively, and have since travelled across the globe from within a decade of their inception. These "fast policies" have "been advocated by multilateral

organizations, including United Nations' agencies and the World Bank, [though they have] been variously 'made,' shaped, and propagated by a wide range of national and local government agencies, in some cases by social movements, and by sundry other actors, intermediaries, and entrepreneurs" (xviii).

What connects these "fast policy" ideas to the creative city? It is the speed at which these policies, or at least the discourse that transports them, have conquered the world. As these concepts travel, they adapt and translate their underlying ideas. Though "fast policy" is about more than velocity alone. Peck and Theodore argue it "refers to a policymaking condition characterized by the intensified and instantaneous connectivity of sites, channels, arenas, and nodes of policy development, evolution, and reproduction" (223). "Fast policy" thus reflects the global process that Pertti Alasuutrai refers to as the *Synchronisation of National Policies* (2016). This process – or "condition," as per Peck and Theodore – is driven by the voluntary sharing and borrowing of policy ideas, without coercion or force. Fast policy therefore excludes conditional "aid" programmes such as the World Bank's *Structural Adjustment Programs*, which are not free from imposition.

Peck and Theodore stress the need to analyse the condition of "fast policy"-making as ideologically tainted. This, in contrast to the more orthodox, largely depoliticised and technocratic framing of this process as "policy transfer" by mainstream political scientists and policy analysts (xviii). Peck and Theodore question this condition without making gratuitous claims about the ideological nature of fast policy, even if they do stress the neoliberal foundations of the process.

In his discussion of creative cities, Oli Mould very explicitly juxtaposes the "Creative City" to the "creative city." Peck and Theodore do not do this. They do not position "fast policy" against "slow policy." Quite to the contrary, they explicitly state that they do not position fast policy in contrast to "once-parochial and hitherto-slow worlds of policymaking" (xvi). Even if Peck does make a fleeting reference to "the prosaic realities of slow (and uncertain) delivery" of fast policy in earlier work (348), it would be disingenuous to ascribe the analytical opposition I use in this article to their work.

The friction between "smooth" fast policy and the stickiness of the context in which it is embedded is a process Christiaan De Beukelaer and Justin O'Connor refer to as fast policy "slowing down." Slow policy, they argue, is rather rooted in "rich, diverse, and theoretically substantiated debate" (De Beukelaer and O'Connor 28). Slow policy is thus a universal aspiration that exists across Tsing's metaphorical bridge. Slowness is not a value judgement that contrasts the fast ("bad") with the slow ("good") as is the case when arguing for "slow academia" (Berg and Seeber). But slow policy signals a commitment to universal aspirations that generate friction as they encounter their necessarily imperfect practical achievement. It is this inevitable process of fast policy slowing down that characterises the friction around the implementation in Bandung, although the process is more complex than a mere "global" idea arriving in the city and colliding with existing processes.

The city has become an important locus for cultural policy-making, in part due to the rise of creative city strategies, but also because cities are at times better equipped to agilely respond to local challenges (Stevenson). This challenges the dominance of the nation-state as the central actor in the cultural policy-making process. But the rise of the creative city does more than (partially) shifting the role of cultural policy from the nation-state to the city. The creative city also connects culture to other policy issues, from planning to welfare and investment. This decentralisation has happened to greater or lesser extent the world over, but creative city enthusiasm is hardly ever the underlying reason for this.

Bandung's engagement with the creative city did not emerge solely in relation to the global popularity of the discourse, but also the history of the country. BCCF grew out of artist-led activist movements, such as Common Room, which emerged in tandem with the demise of Suharto's regime. Founded in 2003, Common Room surfaced as a joint initiative of the Bandung Center for New Media (BCfNMA) and Tobucil, an independent bookshop (Jurriëns). BCCF emerged within the social and physical spaces created by these organisations in response to a policy vacuum, that existed because de-centralisation devolved powers to the local level, but city governments did not necessarily use those. As such, it strengthened the connection between video-artists and cultural activists, which explains the progressive and rights-driven agenda that emerged around the creative city.

When Suharto's New Order regime fell in 1998, it put an end to his centralised rule that had dominated the country since 1968. With the shift to a democratic regime came *Reformasi* ("reform") and decentralisation (Jones), a process that remains uneven and incomplete (O'Rourke). Though it is the drive to decentralisation that has enabled cities like Bandung to take an experimental and entrepreneurial approach to policy-making at the urban level. As the tensions between national, provincial, and local governments remain an area of struggle in Indonesia, policy innovations at the local level simultaneously *build* and *build on* the process of decentralisation. The emergence of *any* bottom-up urban strategy is thus more significant than that a particular strategy happened to focus on the creative city.

Early on, BCCF bought into the "fast policy" idea of the creative city: Their foundation was grounded in this discourse as a way to gather people and organisations from across the city behind a common goal. But that goal itself has remained a fleeting and contested one, as the precise set of objectives has remained opaque. At a later stage, through the formalisation of the creative city discourse as it got absorbed into the city government after the election of Ridwan Kamil, the creative city language needed to become more explicit about what the city is and what it is not. This crystallised in Bandung's bid to join UNESCO's Creative City Network in the category of Design (City of Bandung). This platform for exchange between "creative cities" around the world in seven creative fields (crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, music, and media arts) often ends up being a mere branding tool for the cities that join the network (Rosi).

The proposals cities submit to UNESCO remain under a 20-year embargo, making them publicly inaccessible. The city's submission, which I have been able to obtain, makes explicit both how they profile themselves and how they aim to develop their capacity and support for creativity in the near future. In this process, Bandung started defining itself more explicitly in relation to other Indonesian cities:

> Compared to other cities in Indonesia, Bandung's creative culture differs in the sense that it is closely related to human creativity. Whereas Yogyakarta is best known as the center of 'traditional' culture, Bali for 'religious' based culture and Jakarta for 'commercial' related culture, Bandung can be described as a city of 'creative culture,' hence the vision 'Creative City.' (City of Bandung 12)

The proposal does not define these terms, nor does it substantiate these claims. But it does reflect the reputation of these cities within Indonesia. That said, Bandung's proposal to UNESCO appeals to an undefined and implicit abstract ideal of the creative city, to which – they argue – the actual city of Bandung corresponds better than other Indonesian cities. As the proposal does explicitly divide the city into particular zones of consumption (including e.g. *Factory Outlet Zone*, *Mass Production and Traditional Market Zone*, and *Muslim Fashion Zone*), it clarifies which organisations and companies are part of its image as a creative city, and what claims it makes in terms of the economic performance (as well as future projections) of its creative industries. In short, this document embraces the "fast policy" model of the creative city, as illustrated by the "added value" it promises to deliver.

While Bandung discursively formalised its creative city strategy through the UNESCO bid, my interviews revealed that Ridwan Kamil encountered difficulties in getting the city's civil servants to understand and buy into the creative city idea. But as the creative city strategy formalised, it also encountered contestation. This contestation has at times been very ambitious and constructive (see the "ten characteristics" above). But some "creatives" have been more silent in their critique, as the strategy focuses very explicitly on the forms of creativity that can easily be monetised (design and fashion) and prioritises design over other sectors (including music and fine arts), which alienates those working in these fields.

The formalisation of Bandung's creative city strategy occurred in tandem with the emergence of the Indonesia Creative Cities Network in 2014. At the same time, the national government started paying greater attention to the *ekonomi kreatif*, first under the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–2014), during which Mari Elka Pangestus served as *Menteri Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif Indonesia* ("Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy," 2011–2014), and later under the presidency of President Joko Widodo (in office since 2014), who set up *Badan Ekonomi Kreatif* ("Creative Economy Agency") or BEKRAF in 2015. While Bandung's initiatives inspired the work of BEKRAF, the recognition of the creative economy by the

central government (and the money that comes with this) has fuelled greater interest across the country, often ignoring that Bandung's creative environment derives from its unique history, not from merely adopting the globalised "Creative City" policy discourse. It is in this institutional context that BCCF has emerged and has continued to act. Its efforts to slow down policies lie primarily in adopting the ten principles of the creative city and continuing weekly debates that continue to question and challenge the directions, aims, and strategies worth pursuing. Despite noteworthy research on creative economy strategies in Indonesia (Cohen; Fahmi et al.), detailed studies on the influence of the BCCF on federal policies and *vice versa* remain lacking.

Before Ridwan Kamil became Mayor of Bandung, BCCF engaged in cultural activism and direct action, inspired by the appeal of "fast policy," but characterised by the idealism of slow policy. BCCF lobbied for change while executing initiatives to circumvent lack of understanding of, and at times antagonism towards its aims, within Bandung's city administration. Kamil's election in 2013 created the implicit promise that it would become easier to work with the city government. However, the direct connection between BCCF and the city government prompted BCCF to rethink its aims and strategies: While access makes having influence easier, it makes retaining independence more difficult. Rather than being pulled into "faster" policy pursued by the city administration, several people involved in BCCF turned to a "slower" policy approach. The tension between being "critical" and being "useful" (see Bennett) is particularly hard to balance when different notions of the creative city and multiple layers of administrative and policy processes coincide.

These processes raise the question of which "model" Bandung aspires to. Equally, it raises the question of how to deal with the friction that results in tensions between this aspiration and existing organisations, institutions, and practices, as well as the different ideological and practical objectives that exist among Bandung residents – bearing in mind only a small number of "creatives" have a say in these debates. Moreover, the rather rigid hierarchies of status and seniority that permeate social life in Indonesia make it difficult for younger voices beyond the "usual suspects" to gain traction in creative city debates. As a result, the creative city is not very effective at creating a platform to negotiate its objectives and strategies within previously existing social arrangements, contestations of the creative city, or objectives that are far more ambitious than what the creative city can accommodate. This fast policy has been slowing down for a decade, since the inception of BCCF. Despite the enthusiasm about the way in which Bandung has managed to harness its potential in its rebranding as a creative city, acknowledging the inherent imperfection any encounter between an abstract idea and its implementation is necessary.

The current challenges in maintaining momentum, while reconciling pragmatic and progressive visions for the city mean that there is ample disagreement about what the creative city should be. This calls into question if there really is a "model" that is being pursued, advocated for, or contested in Bandung, or if at present there is mainly friction between ideas and approaches, but no clarity about what is precisely causing that friction?

Friction

Bandung is both a "Creative City" and a "creative city." Bandung has embraced both "fast policy" and "slow policy." This, in itself, is barely noteworthy. Virtually every city has elements of both. In every city, there are tensions at these two levels. One could argue that Oli Mould's claim that the uppercase "Creative City" is a dominant force that actually undermines the creativity that makes the "creative city," is not much more than "fast policy" taking root. While the "Creative City" is indeed an instance of "fast policy" and a "creative city" requires a "slow policy" approach, the remainder of this section serves to show that these juxtapositions reveal, respectively, an abstract ideal and governance grounded in the murky, path-dependent, palimpsests of trial and error (see also De Beukelaer).

Bandung is – both in its history and its present – globally connected. It is not some *tabula rasa* where the global idea of the creative city arrived. Its creative city strategy is merely one of the many ways in which

the city exists through global connections. But these connections do not solely emerge among like-minded people, but also among those with different principles and objectives, much like environmental activism did, decades earlier:

> The [environmental] movement was an amalgam of odd parts: engineers, nature lovers, reformers, technocrats. Modernizing experts and romantic populists rubbed shoulders there. Social justice advocates made plans with sympathetic regime bureaucrats. (Tsing 17)

The environmental movement exists and functions because of, and not despite, the heterogeneity of its constituents. The variety of people and their conflicting ideas have allowed them to collaborate, rather than produce conflict (Tsing x). The results of these tensions manifest as "zones of awkward engagement" between the people and interests that result in friction: "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (Tsing 4).

The creative economy functions in a very similar way: The diversity of people involved ranges from artists to venture capitalists, from politicians to human rights activists, and from real estate developers to academics. Their diverse interests manifest when discussing creative cities. This creates friction in deliberating the ontological question of what the creative city *is* and the normative question of what it *should be*. Tsing offers an apt image to illustrate this tension:

> Roads are a good image for conceptualising how friction works: Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. (Tsing 6)

The road as metaphor for friction works well in relation to the creative city of Bandung as discussed above, because while policy ideas are very mobile, "the achievement of policy outcomes remains a stubbornly localized, context-specific process" (Peck and Theodore xvi). This process derives from the ways in which these global ideas travel on existing roads, while creating new ones alongside or superimposed on them. Rather fittingly, the *Cihampelas Walk*, an elevated walkway built above the busy Jalan Cihampelas, is one of the most visible accomplishments of Ridwan Kamil as mayor. It is superimposed on the congested traffic area in both a practical and symbolical sense. Rather than making the city less congested, *Cihampelas Walk* and the "Creative City" the project symbolises, is superimposed on the high-traffic thoroughfare. By building on, rather than transforming, the existing infrastructure, the intervention does little to challenge or alter the underlying logic of mobility – and capital. This intervention is not unique, as the space below the Pasaputi overpass houses "Taman Koje" (short for "taman kolong jembatan," or "park under the bridge") (Martin-Iverson 122).

Let us look at three "roads" that now generate friction before returning to an exploration of how friction can be constructive.

First, BCCF has its roots in *Common Room*, which in turn emerged from a collaboration between the BCfNMA and the independent bookshop *Tobucil* as well as events like KickFest and HellarFest. These initiatives were in turn connected to the artists and activists who were active around the fall of Suharto's New Order regime, and drove a rethinking of the urban sphere in a post-New Order Indonesia (Fahmi et al.; Jurriëns). Because of this history, *Common Room*'s "status as an independent art community has enabled it to simultaneously promote and take critical distance from creative industry projects and discourses" (Jurriëns 173), which initially influenced the way in which BCCF has approached the "creative economy." The activism connected to BCCF is thus rooted in previous struggles, well beyond the "creative city" around which it formed as an organisation. But a rift has emerged, as many activists now see BCCF as the advocate of "Creative City," while they remain advocates of the "creative city." Moreover, a challenge inherent to BCCF is its natural alignment with the predominantly middle-class views and priorities of artists and academics, rather than those of the working classes in the poorer south of the city.

Second, Indonesia has changed significantly since 1998, when *Reformasi* started (Jones; O'Rourke). This process led to decentralisation of power to provinces and cities, but the degree to which this change has materialised depends to some extent on those smaller political units. It is thus through the initiative of cities and provinces, and the policy entrepreneurship and experimentation this generated that *Reformasi* took

shape, rather than it being an *a priori* objective. Though this era was also one where different ideologies surfaced and became part of the political debate: "Al Qaeda competed with Bollywood and Marx in shaping local visions" (Tsing 215).

Third, my fieldwork has revealed that in the popular political imaginary of present-day Indonesia, Bandung plays the role of a springboard. As the largest city of West Java, the most populous province of Java, the most populous island of Indonesia, Bandung symbolises power. This is not simply because of numbers, but also because of proximity, as the suburbs of Jakarta reach into the province of West Java. The assumption among my informants was that the Mayor of Bandung would seek a higher office (Ridwan Kamil has been Governor of West Java since September 2018), the question of whether the Indonesian presidency is next is echoed by Zakir Hussain, a political commentator for the Singapore broadsheet *The Straits Times* (Hussain). This assumption derived from the (rather anecdotal) trajectory of Joko Widodo, who has forged his path to power from mayorship (in his case of the city of Surakarta, to governorship of Jakarta, to the presidency). Whether or not Ridwan Kamil will use his positions as mayor and governor as springboards to the presidency, is largely irrelevant because it is the very idea that Bandung has an important political function that puts pressure on the political imagination of who the Mayor is, and what their ambitions are. Moreover, my interlocutors have indicated they believe that, because West Java has a large population and rather conservative Muslim majority, the province also serves as an interesting testing ground for political ideas and cultural trends across Indonesia. This too creates friction.

Conclusion

In Bandung, different people and organisations embraced the language of the seemingly de-politicised "Creative City," others re-politicised the creative city as it incurred "social movement" by travelling geographically and transforming consciousness (Tsing 214). Rather than simply juxtaposing the "global force and local response" of the creative city, which did indeed result in friction, I follow Tsing in her contention that it is in the pressure that augmented the appeal of this unifying discourse that misunderstandings "begin to coalesce in the space of partial agreement" (Tsing 272).

Much like peace and sovereignty, the ideal of the "creative city" exists only as an abstract universal: No city resembles this abstract ideal in its practical achievement. The creative city can never be accomplished, for there is no blueprint that can be built to, nor is there a set of formal criteria to be met. And, while there is ample potential for formal recognition, every scheme granting titles (such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, of which Bandung is a member) comes with its very own criteria and definitions.

Even Richard Florida, the most prominent proselytiser of the "creative city" and its resident "creative class," now admits that the promise of the creative city has all but collapsed under the weight of the side effects of the popularity of creative cities (Florida), while stressing that this book does not constitute an apology for his overtly celebratory optimism, as some argue (Wetherell). And yet, global enthusiasm around the "creative economy" has created the illusion of a transformative power that is barely dented by its contradictions and failures.

The creative city is both a vehicle for these challenges and a challenge on its own. But perhaps the engagement with "creativity" is not simply a way of buying into the "creative economy" and the "creative city," but rather a way to move beyond culture and religion. Anna Tsing argues that during the New Order era, "the environment was one of the few topics open for critical discussion." While the environment was a safe topic then, "creativity" is safe now. It refers to tradition, culture, religion, expression, and contestation. But the neutrality of the term itself means that it can be interpreted and used by people with very different beliefs, ideologies, and objectives. It is precisely because of, and not despite, the apolitical use of creativity that comes without cultural or religious connotations, which allows artists, activists, politicians, and policy-makers to transgress the ethnic and political tensions that have increased in Indonesia in recent years.

The way friction plays out in Bandung is not unique. Different concepts and buzzwords are employed to convey bland but appealing ideas. The creative city is a case in point. Though it is precisely because of the very different interpretations and uses, depending on the objectives, politics, and ambitions of those using them, that friction emerges. This friction may help to repoliticise discussions concerning the objectives of, and the trajectories towards, the creative city by challenging how the creeping formalisation of the "Creative City" has depoliticised its meaning.

And it is this friction that can help bridge universal aspirations (which are by definition impossible) and the practical achievements (which are in turn always imperfect and incomplete). In sum, Bandung's aspiration as an "emerging" creative city will remain incomplete, for it will never attain the universal aspirations this implies; though the creativity that exists in any city remains its own achievement, irrespective of the policy language that happens to be fashionable.

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