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Behind the making of tourism: contested space in between commodity and locality. The case of inner city "Beautification" in Palembang, Indonesia

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~~The paper discusses the issue of commodification by considering the attributes of urban tourism place making and its relationship to the processes of socio-spatial transformation. The main question is whether tourism development has exacerbated the existing forms of social and spatial equality or provided new capital opportunities for marginalized areas. The field research was carried out in depth by key informant interview, field observations and community mapping analysis, which were conducted in this primarily inductive analysis as a means to gather the primary data. These data collection techniques effectively provided ways to analyze the tourism place making impacts on locality as a respond to the analysis of economic growth of the city~~

The paper focuses on the theme of city attractiveness in the era of inter-urban competition beyond the geographical boundaries. It delivers the concept of global tourism trend and the way in which it intertwines with the local tourism place-making, especially, given the industry product development on the global and local scale. Following the economic turmoil in Indonesia as a consequence of what has been frequently called "urban crisis" in the 1990's and early 2000's; Palembang had adopted a decentralization policy to overcome the urban decline. The emergence of achieving good government emanates in the changing patterns of the state policy to the city, which facilitates the city to enter the stage of active place branding in attempt to gain competitive advantage in attracting foreign and domestic investment.

Despite of its charm as a magnet for attraction, the tourism becomes "urbanization", where cities are becoming the new combination of destination and origin, and thus are regional economic centers. Related to this, many urban development strategies in Palembang are gradually formulated in the form of leisure; to be produced, packaged, marketed and eventually consumed. Policy makers and other actors concerned with urban development, tourism marketing and planning have started to recognize the potential of places left over by tourism. On the other hand, actors concerned with neighborhood development pay attention to tourism along with other consumption based strategies, as potential means to contribute to the regeneration of poorer neighborhoods. In the broader critique of the contemporary urban development policies and practices, tourism development on the neighborhood level has been attacked for commodifying and exploiting local communities, culture and heritage for the benefit of developers and other private sector actors, fuelling the process of gentrification and paying little attention to the needs of the urban poor and other vulnerable population groups (Huning & Novy, 2006).

Much attention will be given to the rapid development of infrastructures accelerated with the announcement of Palembang as a Mega-Event host, starting from 2000. Palembang underwent a major transformation from a dirty city with high crime rate into a tourist destination started in 2000s, when the city hosted the 16th national sports event. After hosting several national events and promoting itself as a cultural destination, it was on 27 September 2005 when Palembang first

inaugurated as a water city, compared to Bangkok and Phnompenh. In 2008, “visit mus2008” a tourist campaign was started as the city has completely revamped into a tourist friendly city with Musi River as the major attraction. Driven by sudden tourism growth, the process of commoditization has had a significant implication on the ‘locality’. by transforming its surroundings in order to accommodate the requirements of tourism. Paradoxically, many of the components of tourism development have come to deal with eviction renewal. In order to beautify the image of the city, the state actors pursue projects that guide private developers to invest in the construction of tourism amenities while the existing communities are relocated to the periphery into low-cost social rented housing. However, what should become the main concern of urban renewal is its effects on the urban environment at many levels; the preservation of the city’s identity, community, local culture and natural and built environment and therefore must be given special attention in the renewal process. (Mumford 1956, Lynch 1960, Jacobs 1961).

Driven by the growth of Riverside and heritage tourism, the inner city of Palembang is modified into a tradable commodity, where the space is identified as a ‘product’ and its users are seen as ‘consumers’. Hoffman, Fainstein, and Judd (2003:5-7) put emphasis on the transformation of function of the city, e.g ‘old historical quarter converted into tourist destinations’ which became such tourist commodity which is typically inserted into the slum landscape and old market. In the case of Palembang, the paper will specifically pinpoint two ongoing beautification projects in Palembang namely waterfront and the re-invented public space under the Ampera Bridge. Therefore, a relevant formal planning and administration is created not only in promoting and preserving such places but also to manage the process of accumulation and manage the relationship between capital and labor and how they are situated in urban space. Without proper regulations and institutional structure, this development could lead to the conflict between the needs of tourists and of the local people.

Given that, Palembang has appeared as a potential player of urban destination which depends on the role of proactive governance to manage its resources. With decentralization granted to the local governments, the new constellations between public and market actors emerged, which is attributed to the capitalist economies (Heynen, Robbins, 2005; Jonas, Bridge, 2003; Pike, Tomaney, 2004). Enticott and Entwistle (2007), among other scholars, argued that the private enterprises are becoming the pivotal agency for the public sectors. Such a statement is also promoted by Hall (2007) by claiming that the management of places by tourist and destination economy strategists’ respectively becomes market driven in which the relationship between the public authority and stakeholder autonomy generates the productivity of regional economy. Therefore, it is important to understand the power relations embedded in tourism place-making to distinguish if the locality is merely produced as a relational outcome rather than an authentic characteristic of a place.

Referring to the conference’s focus area of local and regional development in terms of capitalist growth, the paper discusses the issue of Palembang transformation that depicts the configuration of regional and local regulatory context of urban tourism place-making. Essential to this is the understanding of the impact of tourism which is constructed through recognizing that tourism is governed by regulatory frameworks constituted at different geographic scales; national, regional or local scales. The principal concern is the way in which cities are shaped by efforts to attract and control visitors and by the economic, spatial and cultural impact of non-residents living within them for limited times. Therefore, to theorize the impact, it is useful to investigate socio-cultural transformation on how neighborhood is related to the neighborhood’s stock of social and cultural capital. The spatial transformations are investigated with the aim is to analyze and interpret the spatial distribution of tourism in association with a wider set of urban changes (suburbanization,

globalization, and gentrification). The implication of recent development in tourism for especially the “physical” environment enables the sight on how the environment is being “read”, how it is appropriated and how it is exploited. -

The initial result of the research shows that places are transformed by the development of services occupation and industries to create what we call “urban experience” often without considering the neighborhood effect. Since the advantage for targeting initiatives at the community level occurs from the fact that the locality is the most appropriate area for fostering community identity.