

# **THE PLACEMAKING OF DESTINATION**

## **Localization and Commoditization Process in Urban Tourism**

Study case of Palembang, Indonesia

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## **Abstract**

This research addresses the discourse of tourism as a tool for place-making of urban destination. Relevant to the study of place-making is the analysis of the commoditization and localization process dependent upon the appropriation of urban landscape and local cultures. In the research, localization is interpreted as the act of determining the attributes of locality, while commoditization is defined as the process by which local attributes that have commercial potential end up in becoming tourism commodity. Following this, the commoditization of intrinsic cultural value is disseminated within a branding strategy and intervention reflecting social and political relations.

Therefore, the research suggests that tourism place-making has not only been constructed through the top-down regulatory body, but has been also generated through the attributes of its locality. By utilizing the critical and constructivist paradigm, the research depicts the conditions of the localization and commoditization process in establishing the base line of its realization within the symbolic economy. Thus, a qualitative case study approach was adopted.

The study area of this dissertation is Palembang, as one of the capital cities in Indonesia advancing in its overall urban development. To investigate urban tourism as a tool for development strategy, it is useful to investigate the role of tourism which embodies (1) spatial transformation; how tourism gives significant impacts on urban form, and (2) the socio-cultural aspect; how neighbourhood is related to tourism industry. The findings suggest that tourism place-making involves the reciprocity of urban dynamics: cities take on tourism as a reference model of development, and tourist areas adopt the proliferation of cultural lifestyle to meet the industry's demands.

**Keywords:** Urban tourism, Transformation, Place-making, Localization, Commoditization.

## Preface

### *Why I wrote on this topic*

The motivation for this research came after several visits to capital cities across Indonesia, which one of them was Palembang. In 2002, I visited Palembang for the first time through a compulsory school trip. The land trip took us 4 hours from Bandung to the Tanjung priuk port (in Jakarta peninsula), 3 hours of waiting in line to get into a ship which finally took our bus together with hundreds of vehicle crossing Java strait to Bakahuni port of South Sumatra. Arriving in Lampung was not the end of the trip, as we had to go through the *sawit* forest connected with small villages (Kampong desa). There was around 800 km ahead of us to reach Palembang. Villages were only visible in every 60-80 kilometres as life was scarce along this national route.

During the school, I was informed that Palembang is the oldest city of Indonesia. It was proven by the discovery of *prasasti* (Sriwijaya artefacts) of 6<sup>th</sup> century. The influence of the kingdom had reached the area of today's Thailand. Having this in mind, I had encapsulated the idea that the city had to be an amusing one: rich with cultural expressions, on-going local events, and well-preserved vernacular architecture, just like what already long renown in Yogyakarta.

With the total of 18 hours of land trip, we spent only two days in Palembang to continue up north direction to the final stop of South Sumatra National Forest and Bangka-Belitung seaside. The tour from the hotel to the selected cultural museums or ancient Sriwijaya artefacts was guided by the agency workers and was hurried in order to escape our sight from the dullness and unattractiveness of the inner city. It was where the city slum still conquering most of the inner city stretching from BKB (Benteng Kuto Besak) until the traditional market of 16 Ilir.

Three years later, nevertheless, I visited Palembang again. During my bachelor study, we had a joint University event which led me to visit a local Songket workshop in one of the inner city's Kampong. Something had changed: we could finally see the Musi River from the Sultan Mahmud Bahmaruddin Museum in BKB. Even though the River Tourism was not yet strongly promoted, the municipality had relocated the slum dwellers as well as illegal street vendors from the Musi riverside prior to the PON (National Sport Event). Furthermore, we could also penetrate the Ulu area across the river. It was then when Kampong Kapitan of 9/10 Ulu started to become a visited cultural precinct. While before, Ulu area was renowned as "tempat jin buang anak" (trans: the place where devil throws its child).

In June 2010, while I was writing my Master thesis, I had the opportunity to work as an assistant researcher of Ministry of Public Housing and Infrastructure in Palembang under the guidance of Dr. Hilda Zulkifli and Ms. Yulis. My thesis was entitled “Slum upgrading and community participation” and somewhat had broaden my perspective into the inner sight of Kampong’s dwelling. The project was to investigate the level of deprivation of inner-city Kampong in order to decide which kampong had the most priority for this upgrading program. Mind you, as a non-local it was really challenging for me to access the cultural barriers of Kampong’s community, let alone to gather data. Only after I reached the official people from the Municipality and through them I was introduced to the local BKM (Balai Keswadayaan Masyarakat/ Community Grassroots Associations). During this field work, I further discovered that, inner-city Kampong was slowly shaped into a tourism attraction after being inaugurated as a River city in 2007 by the former president of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. The region received more funding and attracted more national and international investors. The city was filled with more consumption activities: traditional markets, cultural events, festivals, shopping pedestrians. The slum-upgrading related programs was aimed to enhance the value of the built area and eventually promote the “good” image of the city.

My interest in investigating this process of changes had triggered my excitement of further research into this topic: place-making of destination as I started my Doctoral research in October 2010 at Bauhaus Universität Weimar in Germany. My field research was mainly conducted in Palembang and Yogyakarta; I regularly taught seminars and presented my work in Weimar; and I participated in several international conferences between two continents: European and South East Asia. My supervisory committee was consisting of Professor Frank Eckardt, Professor Desmond Wee and Professor Widjaja Martokusumo. The subject of their expertise was spread across the field of Urban Sociology, Cultural Planning and Tourism Management, and Architecture and Urban Studies.

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## List of Abbreviations

ADB (Asian Development Bank)  
AHP (Analytical Hierarchical Process)  
BAPPEDA (Badan Pembangunan Daerah) or the Regional Development Planning Board  
BKM (Badan Keswadayaan Masyarakat) or Community Self-help Bureau  
BPS (Biro Pusat Statistik) or Central Bureau of Statistic  
BPM (Badan Penanaman Modal) or Investment Regulatory Body  
GCDP Green City Development Program  
DPU (Departemen Pekerjaan Umum) or Department of Civil Services  
IMB (Izin Mendirikan Bangunan) or Building Legal Certificate  
IMG-GT Indonesian-Malaysian-Thailand Growth Triangle  
OMM (Office of Market Management) or Dinas Pasar  
KDB (Koefisien Dasar Bangunan) or Building Basic Coefficient  
Koperasi or Community economy union  
LPM (Lembaga Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Kota) or Citizen's Empowerment Organization PDAM (Perusahaan Daerah Air Minum) or Regional Water Company  
P2KP (Program Penanggulangan Kemiskinan di Perkotaan) or Urban Poverty Reduction programs  
PEDOMAN (Penyediaan dan pemanfaatan Ruang Terbuka Hijau di Kawasan Perkotaa) or Preparation and Utilization of Green Open Space in Urban Areas.  
PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) or Family Welfare Development Organization  
PLN (Perusahaan Listrik Negara) or National Power Company  
PNPM (Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat) or National program of community empowerment  
Repelita (Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun) or Five Years of Development Planning  
RIPPNAS (Rencana Induk Pengembangan Pariwisata Nasional) or The Main Guidelines of National Tourism Development  
RK (Rukun Keluarga) or Community Unit  
RT (Rukun Tetangga) or Lowest Community Unit  
RTRDK (Rencana Detail Tata Ruang Kota) or Detailed Spatial Planning for the City  
RTRWK (Rencana Tata Ruang wilayah kota) or Macro Master Plan  
RW (Rukun Warga) or Second Lowest Community Unit  
SARA or ethnicity (*Suku*), religion (*Agama*), race (*Ras*), and interclass (*Antar golongan*)  
Siskamling or Village's patrolling activity  
SUSENAS (Surver Sosial Ekonomi Nasional) or The National Socio Economic Survey  
UNDP (United Nation Development Program)  
UNSRI (Universitas Sriwijaya) or University of Sriwijaya

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