

INDONESIA



PARTICIPATORY PLANNING AND INDONESIAN POLITICS

by Dr Thor Kerr

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Participatory culture seems to have consigned patriarchal culture to the dustbin of history in Indonesia's recent presidential election. A lean, clever child of the street took on and beat a bloated, bullying son of the elite—or so the story goes. Yet, Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's victory over Prabowo Subianto heralds radical changes in the style, if not substance, of Indonesian politics. These changes have been emerging since the twilight of President Suharto's New Order regime. Back then Suharto's son-in-law, General Subianto, developed a nasty reputation for keeping democratic participation out of politics. Times were different, he argued. And indeed they were. In the 1990s, soldiers could be seen threatening striking construction workers and clearing villages for somebody's vision of appropriate property development. Such was a soldier's life in defending the New Order. Then came representative democracy accompanied by freedom of public expression, decentralisation, the Corruption Eradication Commission, and more recently, an explosion in social media participation.

After three tilts at the executive, Subianto seems to have been utterly defeated by participatory culture. In the most recent election, he had Indonesia's richest men and its biggest media group at his back but to no avail. As former New Order newsreader, Desi Anwar asked perceptively: how could the election have been won by "some skinny, furniture maker out of nowhere who's never ridden a horse, wielded a gun or defended the country in battle?" Subianto had played the part of a powerful, benevolent patron brilliantly throughout the campaign; he had offered an ambitious national development plan with big round numbers; his birthright had been demonstrated; and the most popular television stations had supported him. So what the hell happened?

Pak—participatory culture—was what happened; and it is changing everything. Rather than debate Subianto on who had the grandest national development plan, Jokowi said planning schemes were worthless if they could not be implemented. This resonated with voters because Indonesia's history offers many demonstrations of the perversion of centrally-conceived plans. Rather than being a promoter of such plans, Jokowi's popularity comes from appearing with the people to hear, discuss and solve their material problems. He

developed a reputation for this when he was mayor of Solo city in Central Java, particularly in relation to relocating unlicensed street traders. Rather than follow a tradition of sending in the police (something Jokowi experienced as a boy), he invited the street traders to dinner at the mayoral office to discuss how they could relocate from the flanks of strategic thoroughfares to municipally approved trading areas. Jokowi did not just do this once or twice, he held dozens of such gatherings to build trust and participation in dealing with a substantial urban planning issue. After elected governor of Jakarta in late 2012, he spent much of his time in the field, meeting citizens at home in places identified as urban planning nightmares, particularly in relation to flooding and unlicensed housing. Jokowi used these field trips to accelerate governmental reform by taking a humanistic stance, encouraging bureaucrats to become more sensitive to—and less exploitive of—the city's poorer citizens and their everyday problems. Despite incredible energy, patience and commitment to people's participation in planning, Jokowi has admitted that solving Jakarta's flooding, inefficient transport and sanitation were well beyond his capacity as governor. This was his reason for becoming president. Despite some criticism of Jokowi's lack of major successes in Jakarta, flood control projects have been accelerated and participatory design has become a feature of public housing projects. These are not without problems and questions about who partakes in participative design, but the fact remains that Jokowi is generally seen as having the commoner's, rather than the establishment's, interests at heart. Like all good politicians, he is careful to cultivate this popular image. During a terrible flood in Jakarta in January 2013, Jokowi toured inundated areas in a handcart pulled by citizens rather than enjoy an isolated seat in the municipal-flood-control truck, which was travelling—mostly out of camera shot—behind them. In the early days of this governorship, this was as much about distancing himself from a bureaucracy that had failed to

1 & 2 Jokowi visiting Kampung Kebun Pisang in Tanjong Priok, Jakarta. The new president of Indonesia is known for appearing with the people to hear, discuss and solve their problems **3** General Subianto **4** Ridwan Kamil, mayor of Bandung **5 to 7** Inefficient transport systems and floods continue to plague Jakarta



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prevent flooding as it was about meeting and greeting the people affected by the natural disaster. Jokowi has consistently maintained that all citizens are in this together, and many of the most marginalised citizens love him for it.

Promoting the idea of equal citizenship is perhaps Jokowi's greatest success. In the presidential campaign, he offered citizens equality in public participation instead of Subianto's politics of uniformity, which he saw as exhausting the national community and reducing its spirit of solidarity and cooperation. This equality is more than just a campaign promise; it has been implemented steadily by Jokowi through the production of symbols equating citizen identity. In Solo, he reduced the processing time for identity cards from up to a month to only an hour. In Jakarta, he implemented a smart card linked to free health-care services in which every resident card holder could expect the same level of treatment. National identity card reform and a national roll-out of smart cards linked to free health-care services were key features of Jokowi's presidential campaign. This was as much about health care as it was about identity security, and it was sold as part of the process of developing a foundation for citizens to have an equal opportunity for participation in the social life and public administration of Indonesia.

Since the presidential election, Jokowi's campaign team has invited Indonesia's 70 million netizens to have a say in who should be a minister in his cabinet. Through an online form titled People's Choice for an Alternative Cabinet, anyone can vote for three well-known experts listed under each of the 34 ministerial posts. There is also an option under each post to add another name. The online poll is consistent with Jokowi's promise of a government supporting participation, creative production and inclusion. This had been his leadership style as both mayor of Solo and governor of Jakarta. This style is open to criticism and the uncertainty of public participation in problem-solving. Yet the

release of a cabinet-appointment poll suggests that Jokowi's openness towards inclusion is set to continue, particularly given that the poll's ministerial line-up includes people who had rallied for Subianto in the presidential campaign.

One such campaigner is Bandung's mayor Ridwan Kamil, who appears on the Jokowi cabinet poll for the position of Minister of Public Housing. With almost 600,000 Twitter followers, Kamil has proven to be a highly competent figure in the realm of social media. Like Jokowi, he knows he needs the public on his side to get things done in the city. Kamil has promoted Twitter to the municipality so that social media users can see problems being reported, and responded to, online. According to Bandung resident Tita Larasati, there is evidence that more municipal problems are being solved through social media assistance. "The problems include potholes, floods, fires, street vendors, and beggars," said Larasati. "The municipal departments also often post before and after photographs of the resolved issues on Twitter." Larasati is a lecturer at the Bandung Institute of Technology and General Secretary of the Bandung Creative City Forum (BCCF), which she co-founded with Kamil and other innovative locals in 2008. The BCCF is dedicated "to providing examples and prototypes for the municipal government on how to run events," explained Larasati. These mostly concern the use of public spaces and activation of city elements such as parks, forests, rivers, and residential areas as well as a celebration of local products and industries. Several of these programmes have been formally adopted by the Bandung municipality through the mayor's insistence. "Ridwan operates his Twitter account himself," said Larasati. He often makes announcements about city-scale events; asks citizens to watch out for illegal street vendors, beggars and motorcycle gangs; and offers rewards to people who contribute to the city. "The downside," said Larasati, is "when it is not followed up with offline or real action." Also, citizens without online access are excluded from participation. Despite these limitations, the BCCF has demonstrated effective use of social

media for its programmes, particularly through Facebook and Twitter. The secret of productive social media engagement is, according to Larasati, "all about timing, ...when to upload an announcement... and having concise contents." While she regards Kamil as an effective Twitterer and former chair of BCCF, Larasati sees him struggling to rally sufficient resources and bureaucratic support quickly enough to implement his envisaged Bandung skywalk bridges scheme, and monorail and cable car projects.

"I think the biggest infrastructure challenge is still transportation/urban mobility, followed by garbage management, then... organising the informal sectors," said Larasati. "The municipal government has been working hard to provide options and discipline those sectors, but similar problems keep coming back." The BCCF has tried to go about it differently—holding international workshops in Bandung on design thinking to come up with innovative, and often bottom-up, solutions to urban problems. The next workshop, about identity and citizen contribution to cities, will be hosted by the BCCF from 10 to 12 November 2014. Happening just three weeks after the scheduled inauguration of Jokowi as president, this is an opportunity to discuss what is in store for participatory planning and design in Indonesia.

To join in, tweet @DesignActionBDG. Distance is no excuse; in this age of social media, distance is more about connections in conversation nodes than kilometres in a car. This was demonstrated in the seemingly eclectic coalition that assembled around Subianto for the presidential campaign. Many highly-educated technocrats in Bandung, bosses in Jakarta, and violent enforcers of Islamic piety in various places came together in nostalgic conversation around the erosion of values and the exploitation of Indonesia by a global conspiracy of neo-liberalism. They were unified in seeing participatory culture as a threat to the nation's moral hygiene as they chose to remember it. They drew support from

millions of Indonesians reacting to a rapidly changing culture in a presidential election that asked them to choose between a guided reproduction of the past or an engagement in an uncertain future. Jokowi assured voters they could participate successfully in global consumerism through ingenious creative production if they are supported by an open government and an overhauled curriculum. With a little help, smart, lean kids can defeat bloated bullies. Public conversation around construction sites will never be the same again.

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8 to 10 Street vendors in Bandung **11** One of the biggest infrastructure challenges in Bandung is its urban mobility **12 & 13** Municipal problems such as floods are being solved through social media assistance in Bandung