

**Asia Research Institute  
Working Paper Series No. 219**

**Counter-Hegemonic Spaces of Hope?  
Constructing the Public City in Jakarta and Singapore**

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**April 2014**



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## Counter-Hegemonic Spaces of Hope? Constructing the Public City in Jakarta and Singapore

### INTRODUCTION

As a reflection of society and its culture, the built environment is not an innocent physical structure (Sennett, 1990). Buildings are inseparable from political, social and cultural relationships that shape society within and in-between them. Physical structures become not just a container, but also a reflection of society and the norms that it celebrates (Kostof, 1992; Lim, 2007; Padawangi, 2008; Low, 2000; Madanipour, 1996). Like a myth that normalizes power relations in the interpretation of meanings behind signs, the built environment is often designed and preserved on motives to sustain power hierarchy and to reduce resistance (Barthes, 1957; Kostof, 1991). Making and attaining the public city in monumental spaces is often difficult. Moreover, in a planned estate where planners and architects play an important role to organize urban spaces, ideologies are embedded into design, functions, and even into the corresponding social activities.

Planners and architects alike are bounded by professions that subject them to power structures in which decision-making powers are with those who engage their services (Macionis & Parillo, 2012; Tang, Wai, & Ng, 2011). Although progressive groups exist, the emphasis on architects' central role in socially progressive utopian society risks replicating the very societal relations it tries to debunk (Schrijver, 2011).<sup>1</sup>The built environment, therefore, is always a potential tool to reflect this hierarchy of power and to sustain it, because physical spaces of the city are daily experienced in the lives of the urban residents (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992; Cullen & Knox, 1982; Herlambang, 2007; Hornecker, 2005; Jasper, 1997; Kostof, 1991).

The built environment normalizes power relations by penetrating into the consciousness of the urban residents through everyday practices (Lim, 2007; Low, 2000; Low & Smith, 2006; Madanipour, 1996; Rapoport, 1990). When such reflexive relationships between the built environment and social, cultural, and political relationships continue, changing physical urban landscapes from below means challenging the powers that exist. With these in mind, then how do people alter places? How do residents appropriate spaces beyond the top-down design of the urban landscapes to establish alternative spaces? How hegemonic are the meanings of existing urban spaces? In this chapter, I intend to elaborate on some specific examples in Jakarta and Singapore to better understand how counter-hegemonic spaces are possible (or not).

### THE THEORETICAL DEBATES: HEGEMONY, SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE AND THE PUBLIC CITY

“Change life! Change society! These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space” (Lefebvre, 1991:59). Many large-scale revolutions have occurred rapidly, demanding for instantaneous change, whilst the built environment may not be so easily changed on a massive scale. Jakarta witnessed the Reform Movement in 1998 that toppled President Suharto after 32-years of authoritarian regime. However, the development of the built environment in the city did not follow such a populist tone. Some public spaces have even been altered to become more difficult to access, such as the fencing of Medan Merdeka Park and the beautification of Bundaran Hotel Indonesia (Lim, 2007; Upa, Setiadi, Tumanggor, & Indra, 2005). A decade later, mega projects

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<sup>1</sup> Schrijver (2011) features Constant Nieuwenhuis's 'New Babylon' as a utopia that promotes the 'ludic society' and 'true social space' of contacts between human beings (Nieuwenhuis, 1974).

and shopping malls proliferated in the city, coupled with continuous environmental degradation and poor living conditions of marginalized communities (Padawangi, 2012b).

Marxist urbanists see urban space as the material dimension of a capitalist society (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 1993). Urban spaces are subjected to the capitalist mode of production, in which urban land is divided into private properties that are saleable according to their exchange values. Although there was no specific reference to urban forms and design, he noted the role of city planners as representations of space. The intended uses of space that are planned by these specialists, however, may not be followed by the actual users (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre's insistence that societal transformation needs appropriate space reflected his high regard on the influence of urban space – the material dimension – in shaping the society.

While Lefebvre's theory is useful to highlight the disconnection between the planners and residents, it has not addressed the planning and design processes that kept spatial configurations unchallenged after political revolutions. Urban spaces are lived through everyday activities, such as residents walking, gathering-up, working and performing various activities (Low, 2000). Events, actions, and happenings are expressed spatially in a physically-built environment. They not only shape the urban architecture, but the space too. However, in order for residents to take action to change the space, they need to collectively agree that the present spatial form is not suitable and that change is necessary. Nevertheless, pushing for change requires challenging professionals' exclusivity over urban planning and design.

To unpack the challenges that await bottom-up spatial change, it is important to revisit how hegemony plays a role in architecture urban design. Power structure is sustained through hegemony, in which the subordinate class agrees to be dominated (Gramsci, 2010). The consensus is maintained through education that shapes intellectuals as agents of hegemony. Intellectuals are parts of civil society but they could convey ideas that justify the status quo. This hegemony can be countered from below, but need to be guided by organic intellectuals from the working-class itself (Reed, 2012). Gramsci's writings also suggested that counter-hegemony actually "unfolds as subaltern ideological orders are transformed from within" (Reed, 2012: 4).

What is not yet evident in Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony is how they are expressed materially and spatially. Gramsci acknowledged the importance of ideas – not just material conditions – in the process of social subordination and domination. In the context of a city that clearly has both social-political relationships (as well as cultural) and the built environment, the persistence of ideology is inseparable from the way in which urban spaces are assembled and designed. In other words, urban spaces are reflexive of ideologies at work in the society. Buildings and spaces in-between are strategic tools to sustain ideologies, as they are built to last through generations. Some of them may end earlier than expected, demolished and rebuilt. But many buildings exist through hundreds of years, become heritage buildings and spaces, or even retrofitted to new functions while maintaining the old forms.

Laclau and Mouffe's take on hegemony is more focused on diverse political struggles to obtain moral, intellectual and political leadership (Rosol, 2013; Torfing, 1999). Rosol (2013) noted that Laclau and Mouffe's concept of hegemony was more suitable to analyze contemporary urban projects<sup>2</sup> because it did not embrace full Marxist determinism of class-based hegemonic construction. It is more sensitive towards pluralism and political struggles (Rosol, 2013). This reflects the relative heterogeneity and citizen engagement in contemporary urban societies. Less optimistic note,

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<sup>2</sup> Rosol's case was the EcoDensity Planning Initiative in Vancouver.

however, is voiced by Spivak (1988) in her best known essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in which she claimed that when gender dimension and its representations in culture are taken into account, “the subaltern cannot speak” (308).

Contemporary and heterogeneous urban societies impose further challenge in identifying the roles of residents in the process of citizen engagement. Taking action to change urban spaces and forms would mean that residents have to obtain the confidence to plan and design their own spaces. In this context, spaces also account for spaces between the buildings that are publicly accessible instead of just individual homes. Questions on whose space, representations of space and the authority to justify spatial practices are among those that need to be openly discussed; hence opening the process towards informalities, becoming fluid, potentially recursive, undemocratic at times, chaotic, and anarchic on the way to potentially reflect bottom-up democracy (Douglas & Hinkel, 2011).

Similarly, visual and technical language in the realm of built environment professionals creates restrictions in a field of knowledge and discursive territory to become “the prerogative of a limited set of organizations and individuals” and to discourage public discussion, consultation and participation (Stickells, 2011: 217). Architecture’s social practice “has both supported and reinforced existing social hierarchies and has operated mostly as a mechanism of oppression and domination” (Ward, 1996). The relationship between professional architects, designers and the powerful authority is symbiotic because of architecture’s capacity to project power into the built environment and its applicability to unleash the capacity of urban space to generate surplus value as fixed capital (De Carlo, 2005; Jones & Card, 2011). The larger the urban project is, and the more monumental the urban space is, the more likely it is subjected to planning and design by the experts, approval by the state, or support from big corporations. Assumptions on acceptable behaviours in those designed urban spaces are framed within structured representations and stereotypes within the unequal society. Urban residents are still part of the everyday reality of these monumental spaces, but the state’s role is considerably dominant in outlining the regulations and the spatial forms (Friedmann, 2007).

Thus, professionals who are mobilized by governments and developers become the channels of ‘singular and overriding interest’ in cities, to create wealth through aggressive economic growth and not by redistributing the benefits of growth (McGovern, 1997; Peterson, 1981). Professional architecture is reliant on wealthy clients for commissions, which explains how architectural practice gravitates towards perpetuating material inequalities in capitalist developments. This silent complicity of architecture hinders its affinity to social projects with clients who are unlikely to be able to afford their services (Dovey, 2000; Jones & Card, 2011). While this view sounds overly market-deterministic, it explains how the hegemonic notion of ‘developmental’ policies crept into the profession. Intellectuals would then use their skills to project wealth accumulation as better for the city and eventually beneficial for all residents, albeit unequal. Such confidence is reflected in the expanding use of images of mega projects and glamorous monumental spaces in promoting how attractive a city is. For instance, popular images that are used to promote the attractiveness of Jakarta would feature *Bundaran Hotel Indonesia* and its surrounding five-star hotels and malls in all their glamour rather than images during the time of political protests.

## DEFINING THE PUBLIC CITY

Heterogeneity is the emphasis in the definition of the ‘public city’ in Kurt Iveson’s *Publics and the City* (2007). Rather than seeing a public city as a place where all residents accept a vision of “being-together of strangers”, in a heterogeneous public sphere, Iveson saw diversity in the way people frame their needs and interests, which may or may not be related to the interests of the city in general (Iveson, 2007: 218; Young, 1990: 238). Coalitions are connections with strangers in struggles to achieve needs, but they may not necessarily reflect a universal ‘normative ideal’ of togetherness in the city beyond a particular pragmatic objective (Iveson, 2007).

On one hand, Iveson’s take on the ‘public city’ reflects diversity, close to Laclau and Mouffe’s understanding of hegemony. Diversity brings dynamic and rather fluid processes of achieving hegemony and to form counter-hegemonic movements. On the other hand, Iveson’s view also indicates a certain consensus on how the city should operate. By accepting differences and possible opportunities for coalition-building, city residents agree that there is a procedure to channel dissent and to articulate subaltern beliefs.

The simplest notion of the public city is a city that is built by, with, and for the residents, where all residents encounter relatively little obstacle to exercise their right to build and change the city (Harvey, 2000; Mitchell, 2003). However, participation in designing urban spaces can also serve to spread hegemony wider to the ordinary people, hence it is necessary to continuously revisit practices and processes of participation.<sup>3</sup> Of particular concern is that residents’ participation in socially and physically constructing the city is subjected to the existing practices of building the city that reify oppressive structures, albeit on a smaller scale. David Harvey’s utopian view in *Spaces of Hope* saw this as a revolution that began when a massive failure of the global capitalist system served as a catalyst for egalitarian forces to emerge. He sees “the right to the production of space” as a human right that enables residents to reconstruct spatial relations and transform space to become a “relational aspect of social life” (Harvey, 2000: 251).

In fact, the terms public, political, and city are very closely related. In the Ancient Greek and Roman societies, ‘political’ was the opposite of ‘self-interested’; and ‘polis’ referred to free and equal citizens and common parts of the city (with the exception of women and slaves at that time) (Hoskyns, 2005; Macionis & Parillo, 2012). The polis is built by the citizens both politically and physically. Given the strength of its public realm it contributes to flourish the city (Hoskyns, 2005). This is opposed to the exclusivity of professionals in the conventional, rational planning and development of modern cities. In line with the public city as the place where its citizens flourish, progressive planning theories have put citizens and civic leaders in the center of planning, such as the social learning theory, transactive planning, and communicative planning (Forester, 1989; Friedmann, 1986). In architecture, the ‘inorganic coexistence’ of academic art and applied technology disrupt the architecture discipline’s contacts with social transformations in general, although there are still architect-scholars who experiment with participatory design such as the Non-Plan program in 1969 (De Carlo, 2005; Stickells, 2011).

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<sup>3</sup> Tang et al.’s analysis (2011) on public engagement and the New Central Harbourfront in Hong Kong and Rosol’s study (2013) on the EcoDensity Planning Initiative in Vancouver reflected that planning strategies could include public participation in order to gain acceptance, but not necessarily mean that they would be inclusive. Planners often refer to Sherry Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969) in categorizing quality of participation, from manipulation to citizen control.

These views on the polis and the public city sound idealistic, but in practice there would most likely be much uncertainties, flexibilities, and changes along the way. Simone's work in Jakarta (2012, 2013) already highlighted the difficulty in having urban plans that are relevant to the residents' aspirations, specifically because of the disjuncture between the planning trajectory and the residents' life dynamics. Even when the global economic crisis occurred five years sooner than Harvey's prophecy (2008 instead of 2013), the revolution towards spaces of hope in the city has not materialized in a massive scale. Social relationships are bound to economic conditions, but the built environment and the processes behind it have their own pace of transformation. When the built environment and professional trainings are developed to hail the creativity of the designer rather than residents, they become obstacles to build a public city. The practitioners' intolerance towards uncertain processes in communities is also a barrier in exploring ways to achieve a public city. The greatest obstacle is when the residents also agree that they are not in the position to change their own spaces, nor to take control over their own lives. This obstacle exists in multiple layers and scales, even down to the neighborhood and household level in which power inequalities may be part of the seemingly acceptable everyday life.

## **PUBLIC CITY AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY**

In the case of urban planning and design, Lefebvre has noted that the urban specialists are the intellectuals (Lefebvre, 1991; Tang et al., 2011). They are trained in forecasting urban growth and designing urban aesthetics through education systems that are often unequally accessible to all urban residents. Urban specialists and professionals are conveyors of the dominant ideology, who affect material changes in the form of built environment. Professionals sustain power relationships through their designs of urban landscapes that are substantiated by their "fragmented knowledge of modern sciences" from their respective trainings that are structured under the operating ideology, knowledge and power (Tang et al., 2011: 92). There is also the widely held assumption that is somewhat shared among the professionals and the ordinary people, that residents are not knowledgeable enough to design the built environment that is so vital to the everyday life and place-meanings in the city. Terms such as 'unplanned' and 'informal' settlements reflect neighborhoods that communities build on their own, but often without infrastructure services that are exclusively tied to the mainstream professional and official planning. As a result, professionally designed urban spaces are manifestations of the ideology that is intrinsic in the knowledge and training of these professionals, which are either depoliticized or glorified (Friedmann, 2007; Macionis & Parillo, 2012). To challenge the existing order of things, leaders of counter-hegemony – who are themselves subjects of various layers of hegemonic orders – must take into account lived historicity in their understanding of social reality to be able to contextualize counter-hegemonic ideologies on the existing ideologies that have been embraced by the people (Reed, 2012). However, in terms of designing the built environment, the presence of existing celebrated urban spaces as best practices and desired lifestyles are far from acknowledging the residents' ability to create their own spaces. For example, Thamrin-Sudirman Street, as the main thoroughfare in Jakarta receives prioritization by the city's planning bureau, but the emphasis on order and beauty in making it presentable as an image of Jakarta leaves no room for local vendors to get formal recognition, even when they are supporting the economy by providing affordable goods for service workers. The grand opening of the Gardens by the Bay in Singapore, a beautifully designed and climate-controlled garden, is in contrast with the imminent demolition of a nearly century-old public space known as Bukit Brown Cemetery – first to make way for a road, and then residential development – even with activists' efforts to preserve it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Elegy for an urban graveyard," *The Economist*, 1 April 2013  
<http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/04/singapores-heritage> accessed 8 April 2013.

In order to mobilize urban counter-hegemonic movements, sensitivity towards material concerns that preoccupy the lives of ordinary citizens is important to obtain moral leadership (McGovern, 1997). Examples of counter-hegemonic efforts towards urban development trajectories have touched on issues of affordability, accessibility, environmental concerns, and public participation, with varying degrees of success (McGovern, 1997; Rosol, 2013). However, counter-hegemonic actions that involve urban residents in designing their built environment require further exploration on the agency of architecture (Stickells, 2011). Rather than being intellectuals that sustain the status quo, architects and designers are also potential organic intellectuals who could break the hegemony of professionalism in planning and design of everyday urban spaces. Ward (1996) insisted that architecture is “nothing but social” and that social architecture “is the practice of architecture as an instrument for progressive social change” (27). Yet, the term ‘social’ needs to be unpacked to understand how architectural practices relate to wider concerns as mentioned above in the context of capitalist material inequalities (Jones & Card, 2011). The unpacking of social architecture enables its implementation into various initiatives such as do-it-yourself (DIY) architecture, guerilla urbanism and tactical urbanism (Stickells, 2011).

Reflecting Lefebvrian right to the city, which is to appropriate space and to participate in the production of urban space, counter-hegemonic architectural practices are in direct opposition to private developments that offer pseudo-public spaces (Douglass, Ho, & Ooi, 2002; Purcell, 2003). These are large-scale developments with certain spaces available for public access that are increasingly meaningful in the daily life of the urban residents. However, these meanings of space are limited by property ownership that exclusively limits the right to participate in the production of space to the owner, who may then assign it to a management entity. Literatures on themed environments include theme parks, shopping malls and superblocks, in which the public are invited to enter but are unable to control the appropriation of space (Crawford, 1992; Gottdiener, 2001; Sorkin, 1992).

Large-scale projects also include gated communities that weed out those who do not own property in it or do not have any relationship with any property owner. Extensive rights as property owners are fundamental in capitalism. Purcell (2003) warned that the right to appropriation “would destabilize foundational assumptions of capitalist social relations” and therefore could “severely disrupt the process of capitalist accumulation” (581). Mega-developments potentially offer distinct spaces beyond the imagination of the ordinary by boasting the power of capital and authority over spectacular design. By preserving stunning visual and technical languages for those who could afford them, extravagant design is fully mobilized to celebrate, normalize, and preserve the ruling ideology. Climate-controlled, policed and leisurely spaces in these developments are often in contrast with chaotic, unpleasant, and polluted outdoors. Counter-hegemonic projects tend to be more flexible and fluid, but rarely match the scale of capitalist developments.

Methodological fluidity of spatial agency brings ambiguity, which stands in contrast with the authoritative characteristics of government-driven or corporate-driven projects (Schneider & Till, 2009). Along with Iveson’s emphasis on heterogeneity – the ‘publics’ – in the construction of the public city, this brings us to the question of whether alternative projects by social architecture could possibly challenge monumental state-driven and capitalist-driven landscapes that are still supported by the silent complicity of architectural practice. Or, are these counter-hegemonic projects limited to philanthropic practices for marginalized urban communities and marginalized voices? There are scepticisms of how a focus on architectural proposals makes projects susceptible to replicate the existing societal system (Schrijver, 2011). But, does that mean only micro-interventions can qualify as counter-hegemonic? How far can alternative projects that treat urban residents as engaged citizens rather than mere users challenge the hegemonic power of existing monumental spaces (Hoskyns, 2005; Stickells, 2011)? How can spaces of hope emerge and challenge the hegemony of



state and corporations in defining the urban built environment that becomes the identity of the city? Moreover, how can spaces of hope be channels of empowerment for all members of society, and avoid being another tool to reinforce oppressive power inequalities in various scales? What enable these alternative projects to take place? The following segment will reflect these concepts based on the experiences in Jakarta and Singapore.

## **HEGEMONY AND URBAN LANDSCAPES IN SINGAPORE AND JAKARTA**

Singapore is a good example where urban planning and design are relatively more authoritative in the region. More than four decades of public housing have transformed living arrangements of many Singapore residents into high-rise, high density new towns. Infrastructure-wise, the public housing flats were significant improvements from many workers' houses in the early independence-era, especially the ones along the Singapore River that was plagued with health issues such as tuberculosis. With the vision of providing a roof over every head in Singapore, the government has embarked on one of the most successful public housing programs in the world (Wong & Guillot, 2005).

The flats provided reliable basic infrastructure services such as electricity, water, sewerage, and garbage collection. The towns where the flats were located also offered jobs that were created in Singapore's new industries at the time. Housing blocks were clustered and were provided with amenities in the form of market and town centers, which were mostly managed by the Housing and Development Board (Housing and Development Board, 1995). Schools, markets, shops, clinics, and playgrounds were standard facilities for each precinct, which is a part of a larger scale development of a new town (Housing and Development Board, 1970). The arrangement of these towns were carefully planned, designed, and calculated to create neighborhoods of convenience, while financing measures were systematically structured to promote homeownership and hence supported the overarching ideological motivation of 'home-owning democracy' (Chua, 1991; Yeoh & Kong, 1995).

Public housing development in Singapore is officially framed as a nation-building project, although the architectural expressions of these new towns come across as functional, even social and lifestyle-driven. For example, Toa Payoh New Town featured a 40-acre town center to provide all residents a place for social gathering, a point of orientation, and a focal point that has all the facilities needed (Housing and Development Board, 1970). The term 'shopping parade' was used to reflect residents' connection with entertainment facilities, market, library, and post office (Padawangi, 2010). Nevertheless, function and lifestyle were architectural expressions of ideology in practice. In the process of relocating residents from dilapidated shop-house structures in the overcrowded 300-persons-per-acre city center to these new towns, social networks of the communist wing was broken down (Clancey, 2003). According to the Housing and Development Board (1970) "the final measure of Singapore's low-cost housing success is the total failure of Communist and communalist appeals to people in the Board's estates and the drop in crime" (9). Furthermore, the breaking up of established minority communities of Malays and Indians and dialect groups within the Chinese majority was ideologically justified as a necessity to prevent any possible race-riots and promote national integration (Chua, 1991). Architecture, urban design, and urban development-related processes established hegemony by normalizing the relationship between the anti-communist nationalist identity and reliable service delivery. Decreasing crime rate, increasing homeownership rate and creating convenient neighborhoods were presented as depoliticized projects. However, these ideological works and maneuvers are specific to the time in history of implementation of the program, as hegemonic practices transform along with the society's material fulfillment (Chua, 1991).

Meanwhile, the used-to-be overcrowded slums in the city center were regenerated as a tourist destination under largely private corporate management. Massive river clean-up followed the development of infrastructures to prevent dumping untreated sewage and waste to the water body. Shop-houses were refurbished from being a packed 18-persons-per-floor residence to house entertainment, leisure and tourism-related services. After several transitions, currently, the riverfront features a large-scale commercial development known as the Central, which hosts over 150 retail stores and food outlets in its retail mall, two Small-Office/Home-Office towers, and one 25-story office tower. The Central also features “a sky garden and recreational facilities, full public amenities and a community hub,”<sup>5</sup> managed by the Far East Organization that boasts itself as “the largest private property developer in Singapore.”<sup>6</sup> Across the river, Clarke Quay has evolved into a “waterfront recreation” with “colorful kaleidoscope of restaurants, wine bars, entertainment spots and retail shops” that substitutes the market atmosphere of the waterfront godowns in the past.<sup>7</sup> Clarke Quay is now owned by CapitaMall Trust, which is the largest Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) in Singapore by its market capitalization and asset size. It also manages 15 other retail malls.

Across the Sumatra Strait, Jakarta – known as Batavia in the colonial period – was the main port of the Netherlands-Indies during the Dutch occupation.<sup>8</sup> Dutch power was concentrated in Batavia, in which they built the palace of the Governor-General, the main shipping port, entertainment and art centers, and the Parliament.

But the unconcealed use of architecture to express political messages was intensified by Sukarno, the first President of Indonesia, who framed architecture as nation-building efforts (Ardhiati, 2005). An architect himself, Sukarno’s ambition to project Indonesia as the leader of the ‘New Emerging Forces’<sup>9</sup> in the 1960s led him to initiate and supervise large-scale symbolic projects in Jakarta. The National Monument at the center of the Medan Merdeka Park – formerly Koeningsplein, the Dutch’s military training ground – was one of the most influential symbolic projects. The first three aims of this monument, which include the adoption of the Independence Day date 17-8-1945 as measures of the building size, the representation of fighting spirit for independence in the building form, and the identity preservation in a museum below the monument, exemplified nationalism at its best. (Jakarta Capital City Administration, 1996).

As a building that represents the Indonesian struggle for independence, the supposedly elegant and glamorous National Monument stands in contrast to the more fluid everyday uses of the park. It became home to many homeless people in the city by 1971, and was turned into a theme park in 1972 until 1990 as an effort to cleanse it. By 1981, it was dubbed as the Disneyland of Indonesia, but by 1984 the management director of the National Monument saw prostitutes as a serious problem of the park. The park also became a business venue for thousands of street vendors, despite the aim of the park plan to “make Medan Merdeka into a Civic Center, namely a government and public center with the goal of enhancing the image of Monas Monument as the City’s identity and

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.thecentral.com.sg/home/index.aspx?key=about>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fareast.com.sg/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.clarkequay.com.sg/malls/static/subpage\\_about.aspx?id=about](http://www.clarkequay.com.sg/malls/static/subpage_about.aspx?id=about)

<sup>8</sup> Netherlands-Indies was the name for Indonesia under Dutch occupation. Batavia is the Dutch name for Jakarta.

<sup>9</sup> Post-World War II newly independent countries.

preserving it as a City Park.”<sup>10</sup>Being host of the annual Jakarta Fair from 1968 to 1991, in practice, the park was more of a public celebration and market ground than a government center.

Yet, no matter how contradictory its condition was vis-à-vis the original concept, the park remained an important symbol of Jakarta. Interviews with park visitors in 2007 revealed that many considered a visit to Jakarta as incomplete without visiting the park and the National Monument. The provincial government also continues to pay special attention to the park through a comprehensive urban plan in 1994, a park plan in 1997, and a restoration project in 2002, although the latest version featured fences around it that restricted access to various street vendors.

Another highly observable initiative of Sukarno was the establishment of the Thamrin-Sudirman corridor that became the current spine of Jakarta. Hotel Indonesia (1960-1962) was the first international hotel in the city and Sarinah was the first department-store (1963). A glamorous roundabout was placed in front of the Hotel Indonesia, with a statue to welcome athletes of the 1962 Asian Games and GANEFO. Thamrin-Sudirman was later developed into high-end commercial streets, hosting various big company offices, branded boutiques inside large shopping malls, skyscrapers, and the Jakarta Stock Exchange.

The nation-building project of the early independence-era established a new parade corridor for Jakarta. Thamrin-Sudirman became the political, social, and cultural showcase of the city and the nation. The New Order regime under Suharto, who overthrew Sukarno in 1965, used the corridor for national-development-themed celebrations, such as the annual Parade of Development and mass walks for Independence Day celebrations. The corridor was also the witness and host to large waves of protests in 1998 that brought the New Order regime to an end. According to the Jakarta Urban Planning Bureau, the corridor continued its presence as the prioritized corridor in Jakarta, where everything has to be the best in the city, because it is the route that the president and the vice president take when traveling to and from the Presidential Palace and the Parliament Building.

These carefully planned areas are in stark contrast with a lot of urban villages in Jakarta, which lack amenities and infrastructure services. Studies have shown that although the 2010 census showed that the city's population growth has slowed down to 1.4 percent per year, Jakarta's urban villages are becoming more densely populated as the working middle classes of Jakarta are moving to enclaves of suburban neighborhoods (Firman, 2011). Many poor neighborhoods do not even qualify for services because of their land tenure status (Padawangi, 2012a). In the absence of planning, urban design, and reliable services, urban residents are more exposed to challenges in their daily life, including the threats of flooding that are exacerbated by deregulated urban development that have deteriorated Jakarta's environment (Firman 2004, Peresthu 2005, Tunas 2008). There are neighborhoods in Muara Baru, for example, which have not had a reliable water service for more than seven years, despite water connections. Traditional fishermen in Cilincing, North Jakarta, are aware of the times of high tide floods, by which they move out to stay in their fishing boats. Many residents of neighborhoods with limited water services are aware of the importance of water and advocacy efforts to voice their concerns. These local efforts are often facilitated by non-governmental organizations, but certainly have implications on the residents' awareness of their neighborhoods, including efforts to make a change (Padawangi, 2012a).

In the cases of orderly-planned Singapore and uncertain neighborhoods in North Jakarta, the hegemonic notion of the built environment as the realm of the planners is stronger in places where urban spaces are built and function according to its plan. In Singapore, the massive public housing

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<sup>10</sup> Jakarta Capital City Administration, The National Monument Office. *National Monument: The Monument of the Indonesian National Struggle*, 1996, page 5.

program is now housing more than 84 per cent of the resident population,<sup>11</sup> with basic infrastructure services of electricity, water, and sanitation functioning considerably well.

Recently, housing affordability has become a serious issue because of the rapid increase in real estate prices. Coupled with the 'Population White Paper' that was published in January 2013 that projected Singapore's population to reach 6.9 million by 2030, citizens increasingly relate the skyrocketing real estate prices, traffic jams, and breakdowns of rail transportation services to the population demand. In order to voice out the unhappiness over perceivably liberal immigration policy and population projection, an estimated 4,000 Singaporeans gathered at the Speakers' Corner at Hong Lim Park on 16 February 2013 despite the drizzled rain. Colorful placards, home-made posters, and umbrellas were visibly occupying the space - the only designated space for demonstrations in Singapore.<sup>12</sup>

Although restrictions are gradually liberated, the appropriation of space for protests in Singapore is still limited to the Speakers' Corner at Hong Lim Park. The park is situated near the central business district, but it has no direct visual access to any government office. As of early 2013, demonstrators are not required to obtain a permit to stage protests, but the existing rules still apply. The terms and conditions of the Speakers' Corner rule that the organizer has to be a Singapore citizen while participation has to be limited to citizens and permanent residents (National Parks Board, 2013). Furthermore, demonstrations should not relate to any religious belief or religion in general, and should not cause "feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility between different racial or religious groups in Singapore" (National Parks Board, 2013: 2).

While the loosening restrictions on Speakers' Corner gradually leads to a more regular use of the space for public demonstrations, interventions on the built environment itself is still the territory of the professionals, who are working largely with the government or corporate entities. Purcell (2003) noted that the "right to appropriation involves more than just the right to physically occupy urban space, it also means that inhabitants have a right to an urban geography that best meets their use-value needs" (581). In Singapore, property rights and exchange value interests of land owners are not the only primary logic in the development of urban space. The state is also an entrepreneurially active actor in deciding strategic developments. The Speakers' Corner becomes a space that is allocated to express dissatisfactions, and the space in itself becomes a political means, but actual interventions in the built environment by appropriating space in the Speakers' Corner is unlikely. Physical alterations of urban spaces are in the hands of the authorities, and residents largely consent to that.

Smaller interventions are subjects of debates, such as the *Sticker Lady* case in June 2012. In that incident, a 25-year old woman was arrested for painting the words on several roads in Singapore in May 2012 (Channel NewsAsia, 4 June 2012). The woman was an art student who also pasted stickers with slogans, such as "Press until Shiok<sup>13</sup>" and "Press for Money" above roadside-crossings-buttons. Stickers with words "So Kanchiong<sup>14</sup> for What" was also found on a pedestrian sign along the

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<sup>11</sup> The HDB Annual Report (2011/2012) reported that 3.2 million out of 3.8 million resident population in Singapore are living in HDB flats.

<sup>12</sup> "4,000 Turn Up at Speakers' Corner for Population White Paper Protest," Yahoo News Singapore, 16 February 2013. Available at <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/huge-turnout-at-speakers-corner-for-population-white-paper-protest-101051153.html>, accessed 10 April 2013.

<sup>13</sup> *Shiok* is a local Singapore English slang (Singlish) that means 'great' or an expression of satisfaction.

<sup>14</sup> *Kanchiong* is a local Singapore English slang (Singlish) that refers to being anxious or nervous.

Robinson Road on 17 May 2012. The words “My Grandfather Road”<sup>15</sup> [sic] was spray-painted on Old Tampines Road, Telegraph Street, Maxwell Road, Robinson Road and Enggor Street between March and May 2012. Many Singaporeans, especially netizens who mobilized to sign a petition for her discharge, considered these as fun ‘public art’ that are relevant to Singapore’s cultural flavor.<sup>16</sup> But the authorities categorized it as ‘vandalism’.<sup>17</sup> *Sticker Lady*, Samantha Lo Xin Hui, pleaded guilty to seven counts of mischief (Channel NewsAsia, 3 April 2013)

Interestingly, two years prior to the *Sticker Lady* incident, Singapore Post (SingPost) commissioned graffiti as a marketing effort before the Youth Olympic Games (YOG). However, the message did not spread well as the public “did not get the message” and the move was criticized by the Singapore Police Force as causing “unnecessary public alarm and wasted valuable resources” (Channel NewsAsia, 6 January 2010).<sup>18</sup> The Marketing Vice President of SingPost said “As part of the YOG is also talking about self-expressing, it's really about sports and arts. And sports and arts is really about expressing yourself and that's the core spirit of it” (Channel NewsAsia, 6 January 2010). Some may argue about the quality of the graffiti and the art, but it is important to highlight that there is a gap between concepts of self-expression and interventions to the built environment. The interesting aspect of this case was the counter-hegemonic tactic that was used to promote a state-sponsored mega event. The result was as contradictive as its origin. Although the initiator was Singapore Post, the idea of self-expression as self-initiated projects in urban spaces was not in line with the hegemonic role of planners and authorities in maintaining and designing the city.

An interesting direction towards appropriating space and asserting participation in the production of urban space is shown in recent debates about the future of Singapore’s Bukit Brown Cemetery. Following the announcement of a dual four-lane road that would cut across a part of the cemetery, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) announced that it would construct a bridge over the land to “minimize the impact on the hydrology of the area.”<sup>19</sup> However, a total of 3,746 graves would still be affected, albeit lower than earlier estimate of 5,000 graves. For these affected graves, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and the LTA agreed to work with members of the community to have an initiative to document the tombs, which was conducted by the Working Committee led by Dr. Hui Yew-Foong from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. The move was in response to citizen mobilizations to preserve the cemetery for its heritage and natural environment qualities, but many activists remain convinced that the cemetery has irreplaceable values that would be augmented by the road development. In addition, future plans for the area have slated Bukit Brown for residential development to facilitate projected population growth, with a planned train station already pinned on the map.

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<sup>15</sup> “My grandfather’s road” is a local Singapore expression that refers to arrogant behaviors on the road.

<sup>16</sup> “The Works of 'My Grandfather Road' Artist”, [http://www.asiaone.com/static/multimedia/gallery/120605\\_stickerlady/](http://www.asiaone.com/static/multimedia/gallery/120605_stickerlady/), accessed 22 November 2012.

<sup>17</sup> “My Grandfather Road” markings identified as vandal, woman arrested, Channel NewsAsia 4 June 2012, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1205555/1.html>, accessed 22 November 2012.

<sup>18</sup> SingPost apologises for “acts of vandalism” on mailboxes, Channel NewsAsia 6 January 2010, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1028960/1.html>, accessed 22 November 2012.

<sup>19</sup> LTA Finalises Alignment of New Road Across Bukit Brown, Land Transport Authority, 19 March 2012, available at <http://app.lta.gov.sg/apps/news/page.aspx?c=2&id=3409b41og5bkgr1vr0asqb8vmgzeso0ghnwn0212451i6dxwk8>, accessed 10 April 2013.

**A website capture of the online portal of Bukit Brown's documentation of graves.**



Source: [www.bukitbrown.info](http://www.bukitbrown.info)<sup>20</sup>

Moving forward with their efforts, Bukit Brown activist groups began to frame the cemetery as a public space. By offering weekly guided tours to the graveyard, they disseminate findings from the documentation of the graves, which are also made available online.<sup>21</sup> The activists' efforts have gradually transformed the cemetery into a public space that is full of activities on weekends. Claire Leow, an All Things Bukit Brown Activist, acknowledged that framing Bukit Brown as a public space rather than a heritage cemetery would potentially increase the public's sense of connection to the place. The appropriation of 'public space' as the use value of the nearly century-old cemetery is a conscious effort to construct place-meaning and to participate in the production of urban space. However, these efforts are still subjected to the hegemony of professionalism and government authority in urban planning, which means that there is no established framework of citizens' role in designing the built environment.

<sup>20</sup> [www.bukitbrown.info](http://www.bukitbrown.info), accessed 9 April 2013.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.bukitbrown.info/>, accessed 9 April 2013.



**Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam (second from right)  
at a weekend heritage walk in the Bukit Brown Cemetery, 31 March 2013.**



Picture courtesy of Claire Leow, All Things Bukit Brown.

The act of appropriating space as self-expressions or conveying messages to the public has been Jakarta's daily experience, not just in the less-planned neighborhoods but also in several monumental spaces in the city. Bundaran Hotel Indonesia is a good example, in which a monumental space was built as a nationalist project, preserved as the city's landmark, and then appropriated by the citizens as 'the' place for demonstrations. Even when the police issued a regulation against demonstrations at the traffic circle since 2007, pointing out the negative impact to vehicular traffic, people continue using the space for demonstrations even until today. During the October 2012 gubernatorial campaign in Jakarta, a flash mob of 3,000 people flooded the traffic circle to support Joko Widodo, the candidate who eventually won the election. They spontaneously marched and danced on the street and occupied the circle for that moment, making a statement that they wanted change to happen in Jakarta.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "Jokowi Ikut Flash Mob dengan Lagu One Direction," <http://foto.detik.com/readfoto/2012/09/16/105057/2020887/157/1/jokowi-ikut-flash-mob-dengan-lagu-one-direction>, accessed 22 November 2012.

**Flash mob “kotak-kotak Jokowi-Ahok” on 16 September 2012.**

Source: Kompas Online.<sup>23</sup>

However, there is a limit in altering spaces in these monumental landscapes. Although flash mobs and demonstrations occur they do not physically alter the monument. Physical interventions and renovations could only be done by the state and the planners. For example, the urban planning bureau launched a major renovation work in 2002 that increased the watery surface of the circle, which was then criticized as a step to reduce spaces for demonstrations (Lim, 2007). The surroundings are five-star hotels, shopping malls, and an embassy, which are all formal structures that are typically owned by big corporations or powerful institutions.

Interviews to passers-by, business managers, journalists, and even street vendors revealed that these big structures are widely accepted as the identity of the place. A little tent behind the police-post at the traffic circle, where journalists and policemen spend their time every day, supported by street food vendors does not count as the place identity. The tent's demolition for more orderly built environment, even when it is at the expense of the cozy hangout space, is considered to be 'normal'. In contrast, self-additions and alterations of houses in the neighborhoods and urban villages to facilitate home businesses, small shops, and small eateries are common (Simone & Rao, 2012). Although these may also be temporary, uncertain, and changeable after several months or years, the idea of individual or communal projects that affect neighborhood spaces is very much alive.

One case that involves physical architectural design in constructing an attempted counter-hegemonic space of hope is the *Kampung Susun* (multi-story village) proposal by Sanggar Ciliwung Merdeka in Jakarta. Situated in Bukit Duri neighborhood along the banks of the highly polluted Ciliwung River, the community has been regularly threatened for eviction. The settlement has been rendered as flood-prone area in Jakarta that would be affected by river widening, hence subjected to resettlement in the name of flood mitigation (Padawangi and Douglass, 2014). With an architect in its team, Ciliwung Merdeka facilitated weekly gatherings, involving households in the community for a possible design proposal to counter the city's resettlement plan. Sandyawan Sumardi, the leader of

<sup>23</sup> <http://politik.kompasiana.com/2012/09/20/jokowi-sombong-dan-overconfidence-494913.html>, accessed 11 April 2013.



Sanggar Ciliwung Merdeka, said that the objective is to plan for “a more proper living environment,” and the process to convince people about the *Kampung Susun* idea was not easy (The Jakarta Post, 3 November 2012). Nevertheless, residents have different views on resettlement and design. Only 281 households out of 781 participated and agreed to the alternative plan that featured apartment complexes infused with public and commercial spaces (The Jakarta Post, 3 November 2012).<sup>24</sup> They also proposed to reduce the river widening plan.<sup>25</sup> The process was assisted by architecture students and a design consultant who worked closely with Ciliwung Merdeka and the community.

***Kampung Susun* Proposal by Bukit Duri Community, October 2012.**



Source: Sanggar Ciliwung Merdeka

Although the governor accepted the proposal, Sandyawan admitted that the January 2013 floods in Jakarta dampened the *Kampung Susun* proposal at Bukit Duri and the government is now considering the river dredging mega-project worth US\$ 25.7 million.<sup>26</sup> There were also difficulties in keeping the residents' commitment and confidence in the project. But the term '*kampung*' (village) itself garnered momentum especially since the election and installation of Governor Joko Widodo in Jakarta in October 2012. As of early November 2012, the detailed urban plan draft for Jakarta indicated ten '*kampung*' concepts for neighborhood revitalization. “Next year, we want 100 spots with various concepts, not just '*kampung deret*', but also vertical housing *kampung*, *superkampung*, *campus kampung*, and *SCBD kampung*, altogether there will be ten types of kampongs,” said the

<sup>24</sup> Changing Slums into Multistory Kampung, The Jakarta Post, 3 November 2012. Available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/11/03/changing-slums-multistory-kampung.html>, accessed 10 April 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Instead of 50 meters, they proposed 35 meters from the current width of 20 meters.

<sup>26</sup> 350,000 Residents to be Relocated in Rp 250b Project to Widen Ciliwung, Jakarta Globe, 18 March 2013. Available at <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/jakarta/350000-residents-to-be-relocated-in-rp-250b-project-to-widen-ciliwung/580395>, accessed 10 April 2013.

governor during one of his visits to Bukit Duri.<sup>27</sup>The '*kampung*' appeal goes back to the injection of identity concept in the urban development of Jakarta communities. The image of future Jakarta as a '*superkampung*' (super village) an alternative vision to counter the image of glamorous global city, won the appeal because it featured urban villages as supportive to the economic growth of the city. Led by a group of architects, the 'Jakarta Superkampung 2045' was framed as "bottom-up growth and densification," using the model of the *kampung* for urban development because it supports specialized businesses that are relevant to each *kampung*'s social identity (Suryawinata, 2012).<sup>28</sup>

The excitement on the adoption of *kampung* model into urban development in Jakarta, however, needs further unpacking on the *kampung* concept itself, in order to see how counter-hegemonic it is. The key of counter-hegemonic spaces that potentially lead to the public city is that planning and design are conducted with the people, and not, for the people. For an architect to be an organic intellectual who gives rise to counter-hegemonic urban spaces, the architect needs to become an activist, who designs as a dweller on behalf of fellow dwellers (Till, 2005). The *kampung* concept entails the residents' role in deciding how to use and adapt their dwelling units and their surroundings to interact with each other, preserve their own space as well as to be entrepreneurial on a household scale (Simone & Rao, 2012). It would be difficult to comprehend the fluidity and the diversity of encounters in urban villages from mediated mapping data without the involvement of the architects as dwellers. Even residents' participation is likely to be fluid and changing; communal and individual interests may intertwine or clash in the process (Simone, 2013). Moreover, there has not been meaningful exploration into local and micro-level marginalization within the community and within families to ascertain whether the *kampung*-inspired designs in government projects such as *kampung deret* and even in community projects like the *Kampung Susun* have really become channels of the subaltern to challenge hegemony down in the neighborhood and homes. Counter-hegemonic designs should include [collective] organizational mechanisms of the community as part of their spatial practices, or else they would serve to reinforce the present social structure that has marginalized them in the first place (Harvey, 2012). As Schrijver (2011) noted, a focus on architectural proposals as urban visions make the city more susceptible to replicating the existing societal system.

The experiences in Jakarta and Singapore do not indicate that counter-hegemonic projects featuring community initiatives only occur in Jakarta. Rather, the hegemony of state- and corporate-dominated built environment in the city is still largely in place in both cities. The fact that small-scale initiatives occur in Jakarta, which are seemingly counter-hegemonic, is more in places where top-down design and planning has failed or has not been implemented. But there is still the unspoken ideology that associates bottom-up efforts as chaotic, unplanned, and only suitable for those who cannot afford a planned built environment. To a certain extent, community-based design such as the *Kampung Susun* does include chaos, uncertainties, drop-outs and changes in the process. Yet, the futuristic urban fascination on planned environments imposes barriers to even explore the possibilities of establishing steps towards achieving the public city. Moreover, the focus on producing 'counter-hegemonic' built environment rather than social empowerment would risk replicating power inequalities, local marginalization and oppression in communities.

<sup>27</sup> Jokowi: Kampung Ditata, Kali Ciliwung Dinormalisasi, Kompas Online, 6 November 2012. Available at <http://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2012/11/06/14123316/Jokowi.Kampung.Ditata.Kali.Ciliwung.Dinormalisasi>, accessed 11 April 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Jakarta Superkampung 2045, Presentation by Daliana Suryawinata at the International Conference on Futurology, 18 November 2012.

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**CONCLUSION: THE PUBLIC CITY AS A COUNTER-HEGEMONIC PROJECT**

The observations in Jakarta and Singapore so far have not shown materializations of counter-hegemonic spaces of hope towards achieving a public city. While certainly there are alternative projects to be observed in Jakarta and Singapore, they are occurring only in certain locations in the city and not as a coherent social movement to make Jakarta or Singapore a public city. Most importantly, they have not been sufficiently counter-hegemonic, in a sense that they have not challenged the ideological domination over residents' role in large scale urban projects, nor have they sufficiently demonstrated equally experienced social learning that leads to equitable community empowerment. Although *Kampung Susun* may be an effort by a group of residents and active members of the society, there is not yet a concerted effort to potentially scale the initiative to make Jakarta a public city by and for its residents. The *Kampung Susun* process also includes much detailed, qualitative, and relational approach in design, which bureaucratically appears as uncertain and messy. Moreover, Jakarta's position as the national capital makes its residents even more subordinated when it comes to decisions over monumental built environment with nationalist ideologies. Residents' right to the city is negotiated for beautification in order to project the nation's image to the world by showcasing skyscrapers, mega projects, and landmarks that symbolize a global city (Kusno, 2001; Sklair, 2006; Yeoh, 2005).

In Singapore, state domination is clear in the comprehensive plan of the city-state, and the consensus of state and professional domination has been built through decades of its development history. Residents' opportunities to exercise their right to the city are also subjected to national concerns and the identity that the state projects to the world. In other words, the built environment of the city as components of identity in the global world is also an ideology that is hegemonic. In a slightly Chomsky-an interpretation of hegemony that is projected beyond the territory of the city (Chomsky, 2003), the race to achieve global city status with high economic productivity has been propelling decision-making in designing the architecture of the city and the mega projects. Architects and planners – most likely in big firms – are riding on this opportunity to establish their emblems, at the expense of the residents' right to the city and even their understanding of that right.

Where do we go from here? How can we make or remake the public city then? Clearly, counter-hegemonic spaces of hope are not only about calling residents to build their own neighborhood spaces. Rather, it is about breaking down the elitism of the design profession and acknowledging the residents' role in the actual design of their built environment. Furthermore, it is also about questioning domination and subordination in various levels, even in neighborhoods and communities, to push for open opportunities for human flourishing, which are often challenging. The Gramscian notion of hegemony is a reminder that counter-hegemonic efforts require existence of organic intellectuals – in this case, they may be architects who work with, rather than just for, communities. However, these intellectuals are also subjected to local, social and cultural complexities that render it impossible to make a public city an architectural project per se. It is difficult to imagine such projects if the image of the city continues to be defined by large-scale, monumental, commercial, and touristic projects. Perhaps this is why it is challenging to identify citywide insurgent spaces in Asia where a city's population can reach 5, 10, or even 20 million, but the magnitude of population does not make it impossible to implement (Hoskyns, 2005). Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of hegemony calls for sensitivity towards the heterogeneity of resident groups and interests, which means that counter-hegemonic architectural and urban design practices would potentially be messy and often times informal, but would result in a public city in which its people are citizens rather than users of space.

Counter-hegemonic spaces of hope also involve working on a scale that is closer to residents: districts and neighborhoods, rather than the whole city-region or metropolitan area that are often beyond the comprehension of daily local experiences. But for these small-scale interventions to be counter-hegemonic, they need to build up to challenge the city-scale – to eventually work together towards constructing a public city. The emphasis in the public city is less on the glamour or monumental scale, but more on the urban development process that includes architectural design projects of shared urban spaces. This process would include fluidity and uncertainty, but the fact that residents have a say in designing their neighborhoods is an important element of empowerment. Thus, a public city is a counter-hegemonic project that normalizes residents as empowered citizens who participate in the decision-making and design process in their cities. Empowerment also includes people and institutions who work with residents. It is counter-hegemonic, because the current trends in globalized urban environments are very much geared towards the opposite direction.

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