PRIVATE CITIES AND CONSUMPTION: URBAN DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Abstract The strengthening of international capital in urban development has made many cities compete to attract global investors. To achieve that, many Southeast Asian governments implement policies that emphasise foreign direct investment to help the poor performance of the local states in the delivery of urban collective goods. Local and international private developers invest in large-scale townships to fulfil housing and investment demand. The creation of office centres, commercial hubs, and middle-class housing estates with international standards is encouraged to accommodate the needs of foreign capital and increase urban competitiveness. Moreover, as part of the new township development, shopping malls and convenience stores promote global consumption through global franchises, chain stores, and name-brand merchandise. Private city development indicates that these projects have become powerful forces in shaping the ongoing urban transition in many countries. The study explores the phenomena from literature review and focus group discussion with private developers, academicians, governments, and non-government organisations in Indonesia as the case study. The study shows that the role of the private sector has become more critical than ever. The private sector can also maximise its influence by building a modern city image and integrating global franchises into their area of development.

INTRODUCTION

The second-generation Southeast Asian newly industrialised countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia have been trying to follow the success of Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. To compete with other nations, many governments of Southeast Asian countries open the door for foreign direct investments to help them increase the urban competitiveness of their cities and help the poor performance of the local states in the delivery of the urban collective goods. Many Southeast Asian governments also allow international developers to do large-scale development, directly linking such areas to globally integrated property markets, ranging from commercial centres, middle-class housing estates, and office centres (Rahman, Hagare, & Maheshwari, 2016).

Over the past decade, many Southeast Asian countries have also seen rapid development of peri-urbanisation. In line with the tremendous increase of urbanisation in developing countries, much of this shift is occurring across vast swaths of territory on the peripheries of major metropolitan regions. One anticipated outcome of these processes of peri-urbanisation is the formation of extensive metropolitan areas with multiple millions of residents (Leaf, 2016). Mega Urban Regions (MUR's) of Manila, Jakarta, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Hanoi, and Yangon represent the above phenomenon. The availability of cheap land for housing and industrial development in the fringe of the cities makes land-use conversions familiar at a multi-level of scale, from small gated residential complexes to sizeable industrial and residential developments. For instance, in the case of Indonesia, sizeable primary agricultural lands in the fringes of Jakarta City provided the locations for new town projects. When they were constructed, there was easy access to investment funds as the international and national market had propelled the property sector's growth, including new towns development in Greater Jakarta (Dijkgraaf, 2000). Local and international private developers invest in large-scale townships to fulfil housing and investment demand. The phenomenon of 'post-suburbia', referring to the decentralisation of urban life to the outskirts of a metropolis, has been extensively studied (Firman, 2004; Rukmana, 2015; Leaf, 1999). The peri-urban becomes the frontier of globalisation, a point reiterated in the analytical literature that emphasises the effect of global flows into these areas, specifically the flows of foreign direct investment (Webster, 2002).

By 1960 only two countries, Singapore and Brunei, had reached the levels of urbanisation similar to those of developed countries, and both can be labelled city-states. Nevertheless, between 1960 and 2000, most Southeast Asian countries experienced rapid urbanisation and contributed to these new towns' development. The private developers play a pivotal role in the urban expansion and new towns development during this time. Leisch (2000b) argued that from the developers' point of view, new towns in Greater Jakarta have been developed with three main objectives in mind: first, to fulfil people's desire of living in a quiet, modern, and secure environment; second, to give them investment opportunities, and third, to get vast and quick monetary profits. While industrial land and real estate development in suburban China and some countries are often planned by the national state, in Indonesia and some Southeast Asian countries, the state only provides broad guidance. It is the private land developers who drive the nature and geography of suburbanisation.

Nowadays, many private developers build high-quality luxury housing and commercial centres targeting emerging and aspiring middle classes, some of which are integrated with industrial estates and office centres. The delivery of essential services and infrastructure within the area is arranged by the company itself rather than by the municipal government, creating what might best be described as a form of private government, in that the company is responsible for the provision of services that would otherwise be the responsibility of local government units (Leaf, 2015). The idea that the government has ceded control of the territory to private affairs has never been considered a problem. From the perspective of local officials, this arrangement in each case is not only unproblematic but preferred. The local government appreciates the benefit of this arrangement in reducing its responsibilities for service provision, while the residents benefit from higher-quality services that could not be delivered through the local government, and the developer benefits from the follow-on effects of keeping prices up (idem).

On the other hand, in the new global economy, consumption is understood to be a means and motor of economic and social change; an active constituent in the construction of space and place; and playing a vital role in constructing our identities and lifestyles (Miles, 1998). Arguably, it is at this historical moment that fixed (structural) identity groups and social

classes (such as those based on class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and age) were beginning to be undermined, allowing individuals to 'freely' construct their identities and lifestyles through consumption choices (Featherstone, 1991). Individualised consumption and lifestyle patterns were thus part of a class distinction project (Bourdieu, 1984). Consumption is not just about goods that are manufactured and sold, but increasingly about ideas, services, and knowledge—places, shopping, eating, fashion, leisure and recreation, sights, and sounds can all be 'consumed'. Today, consumption is more likely to be considered as a pleasurable pursuit, such as stuff from shopping malls, 'retail therapy', credit-card binges, designer boutiques, and trendy restaurants. Conversely, consumption can be synonymous with an exclusion, where for many theorists, consumption is as much about differential access to resources (Jayne, 2013).

In this paper, the author analyses the relationship between consumption and private city phenomena. The developers are able to maximise their profit by exploiting the consumption behaviour of many aspiring middle class in Southeast Asia and their need for shelter, identity, and investment. The author focuses on the private city development in which the majority of the Southeast Asian middle class meet their housing needs. Using the case of Indonesia, in particular around Greater Jakarta, the author analyses narrative data in the context of cities and consumption discussion. These issues are significant as the author argues that this model of private city developments in the fringe area of big cities will become the main norm of urban expansion in many developing countries. This article seeks to address this causal relationship between consumption and city development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cities, Consumption, and Identity

There is evidence that literature relating to the study of cities and consumption has significantly contributed to our understanding of our contemporary society. Jayne (2013) pointed out that the study of cities and consumption helps to explain seemingly globally ubiquitous change related to political life and governance, economic restructuring and changes in

employment, the type of spaces and places that have developed in our cities, as well as shedding light on changes in the everyday realm of our social and cultural lives, including where and how we spend our leisure time, where and what we eat, where we go on holiday, where and when we do our shopping, what we wear, how we decorate our home, and so on. Thus, the study of cities and consumption will help us conceptualise and describe broad urban changes and how we participate in city life in unique ways.

While Karl Marx considered that production is the crucial determinant of social structures and relationships, in recent decades, social science researchers began to consider how the social relations of consumption have become increasingly constructed through a tissue of particular city spaces/places and associated lifestyles and identities (Jayne, 2013). While previously conceptions of status, self-worth, and identity were solely based on the productive work they did on a day-to-day basis, there was now just a great emphasis on the things that people could buy, from work-based identity to one based on consumption (Idem). Consumption assumed a pro-active role in people's lives, becoming a focus of everyday existence regardless of their relationship to the means of production (Hebdige, 1979; Featherstone, 1991).

It is believed that the relationship between consumption and urban life has been a central component of the development of a consumer society. As Jane (2013) pointed out, cities are essential nodes where collective and individual consumption occur on a massive scale. Indeed, for cities to compete in an urban hierarchy characterised by intense competition to secure investment, jobs, and tourists, urban authorities have had to ensure that they create economically and symbolically important new urban consumer spaces. In these terms, we can see that the contemporary city is defined by and through consumption. The contemporary city is the product of the post-industrial consumer economy created through a fundamental shift between production and consumption, where the balance of power between the producer and consumer that pervades daily life has changed in favour of the latter.

In addition, Simmel (1907) identified how consumption had developed as a marker of social prestige and was engaged in discussing the geographies of the changing nature of cities. The social and spatial polarisation between

the 'haves' and 'haves not' has never been very dramatic in our urban spaces and places along the lines of class and ethnicity. Consumption becomes a critical element of structuring this inequality in daily life. It is also a symbolic and aesthetic relation to the emergence of a 'new middle class.' This 'new middle class' try to build their identity through their consumption such as property, vehicle, education, and others to differentiate their class in society. Moreover, consumer choice has become the foundation for a new concept of freedom in contemporary society, where individuals are socially constituted in terms of consumer ideologies and how they differentially construct meanings from such discourses (Leach, 1984).

Private Cities Phenomena

Traditionally, city infrastructure has been provided by the public sector. The range of infrastructure that cities in a developing country need to build is vast—transportation, water and sanitation, solid waste disposal, power plant, transmission, and distribution—and needs to be fit for purpose to support future generations (PwC and Global Infrastructure Facility, 2020). The rapid population growth in many cities in a developing country has already put significant strain on the existing infrastructure. Therefore, cities are now more reliant than ever before on private sector support to scope, finance, and deliver projects (Alexander, Abadie, and Tanda, 2014). The idea of the private sector's role in urban development becomes crucial is also supported by the World Bank (World Bank, 2019). Many private developers built high-quality luxury housing and commercial centres and, at the same time, improve the infrastructure of the area.

The term 'private' describes the virtues in three ways: private ownership, privatisation and commodification of urban(ising) space, and private corporate management (Douglass and Huang, 2007). The author defined a private city as a fully functioning city built on privately owned/ leased, planned, and developed by a private company (developer), and managed as a whole entity by the same or another private company, including the provision of all or most of the public services/utilities (technical and social infrastructure). While private cities and gated communities have many similarities, private cities are typically larger. More significantly, they integrate various residential, commercial, and leisure functions usually present in an urban area (Pervical and Waley, 2012).

Figure 1. Bintaro Jaya, Private City in Indonesia

Source: bintarojaya.id

There are some characteristics of private cities, such as:

•Mega projects with mixed land use where people may live, work, shop, and relax

•They are managed by a private company rather than a local government which is responsible for establishing general rules

•Rules and responsibilities associated with management are often informally negotiated

•All these characteristics constitute a new form of urban governance

These characteristics are similar to those reported by Pervical and Waley (2012), who suggested that the connection between various forms of private cities is that they offer to build cities from scratch, substituting local governing bodies such as municipalities with a corporate form of governance. In Indonesia, the availability of cheap land for housing and industrial development in the fringe of the cities make land-use conversions are common at a multi-level scale, from small gated residential complexes to sizeable industrial and residential developments, ranging from 500 to 6000 ha (Firman, 2004a; Winarso and Firman, 2002). The population also varies from thousand to hundreds of thousands of residents.

METHODOLOGY

One of the most well-known tools for assessing local knowledge and perspectives is focus group discussion. The method is particularly useful to

gain an in-depth understanding of social issues. Focus group discussion is a technique where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Hayward, Simpson, & Wood, 2004).

The data were collected through two focus group discussions (FDG) conducted via Zoom Meeting on February 2021 and April 2021. The focus groups were part of the International Urban Talk series held with the central theme of decoding private cities in ASEAN. In order to canvass a range of opinions and perspectives on private city phenomena, the focus groups consisted of different categories of participants from different backgrounds, academics, urban planners, private sectors, and communities from ASEAN countries. The participants were recruited through the university email networks.

The number of participants in the focus group discussion, each lasting 2–2.5 hours, varied from 15 to 25, with an average of 20 participants. In focus group discussion I (February 2021), three group discussions in different breakrooms discussed specific issues regarding private cities' development and how they experienced it in their city. Our participants mainly came from Indonesia, some of whom came from Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. A few of them lived in private cities in the inner-city suburb of Jakarta and other cities in Indonesia. A facilitator becomes moderator and minutes meeting taker in every breakroom. In focus group discussion II (April 2021) the participants were also from different backgrounds, except in this focus group, some of them were from the local government. Two different breakrooms discussed various topics regarding private cities and how private cities can become more inclusive. A total of 84 people participated in the two focus group discussions.

RESULTS

Private Capital in the Form of Urban Areas: Private Cities

Most big cities in Southeast Asia are under great stress, congestion,

pollution, high population densities with slums, lack of reliable infrastructure, and inadequate housing. To escape all of this 'chaos' is very attractive, and this is what private cities offer. The demand for the private city has been essentially generated by the need for security and fulfiling exclusive lifestyles, while also selling an image of 'modernism' to allure the new middle class in Southeast Asian countries. Real estate developers and the media portray modernity and modernisation as symbolic and conceptual flows through private city development.

On the other hand, in the current urban expansion in Southeast Asian countries, the involvement of private developers has more than ever become more important. Some respondents highlight the critical role of private developers to become the pioneer of development in their area, that at first, did not attract anyone to live there, but after a well-known developer built the infrastructure, the area developed rapidly. One woman told the author that "Kelapa Gading was a deserted area before the developer (PT. Summarecon Agung Tbk) built a commercial site like house-shops with low rent … the area is developing rapidly until now". Another participant pointed out the same case in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Not only does the area become the pioneer area of development, but some developers also help the government with transportation access and give massive income to the local government through taxes and retribution. In addition, it is likely that after a developer builds their project, the area's housing price also goes up.

Nevertheless, there is a lack of literature on the definition of this kind of development, which stresses limited government and market-driven provision of goods and services. Most studies in urban development have only focused on the phenomena of gated communities, inclusive cities, and public-private partnership or conflict of interest. The private city is still a very broad concept whose definition itself still needs to be addressed. While many works of literature discuss the phenomenon of these developments, different terms are used, such as self-contained edge-city (Douglass and Huang, 2007), new town development (Dijkgraaf, 2000; Firman, 2004), satellite city (Percival and Waley, 2012), and gated communities (Leisch, 2002). 'Private city' is frequently mentioned in urban development literature, but it tends to be so loosely applied as to be meaningless. Nevertheless, the author argues that private city definition is fundamental to making policy and framing interventions in urban planning in many developing countries.

Correlation Analysis of Private Cities and Consumption

As mentioned in the literature review, the nature of everyday urban life has been profoundly affected by the economic and social changes in the last few decades. The profound change has been the decline of the manufacturing and heavy industries and an increase in the importance of post-industrial service industries such as banking, financial services, marketing, advertising, and the retail sector. Cities attempt to keep their significance by developing business, financial, and professional sectors and emphasise the shift to the service sector. Alongside this shift, there has also been an increasing growth of the importance of cultural industries. Hence, the economy of the postmodern city is less based on the production and consumption of goods, but more on the production and consumption of culture. This is in contrast to modern cities, where function shaped appearance, style, design, and appearance rule in postmodern cities (Jayne, 2013).

Interestingly, one of the most consistent aspects of private cities is their appeal to and actual practices of going "global". Almost all these private cities invoke global terms such as "world" and "international". Arguably, in doing so, it serves to give legitimacy to global corporate production and control over these projects before, during, and after their completion (Douglass and Huang, 2007). The private developer also builds many infrastructures such as parks, international schools, and modern hospitals as complements to their housing project intended to attract residents from the inner city and abroad. One participant said that "in the absence of government in 30 years (in Indonesia), the private sector has filled in the gap that the government left in building the infrastructure…the private sector sees this potential and transforms this into a fully managed area by the private developer". Another person also commented that "the government still has the power (to control their territory)…and if private sectors own the land, why does the government not facilitate them (to build the area)… so the government becomes more as an enabler". Some respondents also pointed out that most amenities are reserved for residents only, who must pay a user fee to use their privileged access. Arguably, these private cities are able to satisfy the needs of professional, high-income earners, a new middle class in Southeast Asian countries, whose salaries and bonuses allowed them to pay high prices for consumer goods, consumption spaces, and gentrified housing.

Figure 2. IKEA Store in Alam Sutera, a Private City in Tangerang, becomes a Symbol of 'Progress' and 'Modernity' in the area
Source: youtube.com

Moreover, as part of the new-towns development, shopping malls and more scattered convenient stores promote global consumption through the global franchise, chain stores, and name-brand merchandise. Many franchises such as KFC, Loteria, McDonald's, or other international fast-food franchises are replacing local food products. The projects are dependent on having these fast food and haute fashion, cosmetics, and accessories to validate their global worth. Neither edge-city nor global retail consumption can do without the other (Douglass and Huang, 2007).

DISCUSSION

Privatisation and Commoditisation of Urban(ising) Space

"Privatisation allows for nearly total commodification and marketing of space inside of the edge-city-mega-projects. Except for public goods such as roads, space in these megaprojects is a commodity to be packaged, branded with commercial identities, and sold to investors and users."
(Douglass and Huang, 2007)

While academics and activists warn of increasing socio-spatial cleavages arising from the current urban development practices in Southeast Asia, it can be argued that the most critical broad trend shaping the ongoing modernisation of Asian cities has been the rise of large-scale private capital

in the production of urban space (Leaf, 2015). Capitalist urbanisation will likely become the norm of third-world urbanisation with a relatively limited local government's state regulatory and fiscal capacity. On the other hand, homeownership still becomes the main agenda for housing policy in most Southeast Asian countries, while cities are seen as engines of long-term economic growth.

In brief, the last 20 years have shown the shift in which the state increasingly accepts the emergence of the private economic sector and facilitates foreign investment. While a study by Dear (2012) shows that in the US case, a "shadow government" can collect revenues, regulate, and enforce without accountability through democratic governance, it is often responsive mainly to the whims of globally oriented wealth creation. In the Southeast Asian private cities, corporate management as the government is not in the shadows but is an explicit facet of the entire arrangement (Douglass and Huang, 2007). The question is whether these private city models can be sustained as the urban expansion model for Southeast Asia in the future. The income requirements for residing in the private cities suggest that they are unlikely to account for more than 5-10 percent of the total population of their host city-regions over the long term, but many of these private cities are designed for half of a million residents or more. These private, commodified, exclusive, homogenous, secure, and global urban expansion models are arguably not sustainable. In addition, it is also in contrast to the current emphasis in planning practices on 'compact cities'; many major cities in Southeast Asia have kept seeing rapid deconcentration of older inner-city districts and expansion in surrounding areas.

CONCLUSION

As a result of global influence in the urban expansion of many Southeast Asian cities, the private cities development indicates that these projects have become powerful forces shaping Southeast Asia's ongoing urban transition. As Douglass and Huang (2007) pointed out, all of these projects have common features about physical planning and have a great deal to say about the type of society they envisage in the spaces they are producing. In emphasising how they will create a new type of city and society, they join a long history of proposals about the city presented as grand solutions

to existing urban diseases and thus fit into the realm of utopian planning.

Some concerns are how this type of urban space production is given no room for the poor in their edge-city projects, the vernacular, or a public sphere of governance. They are being wrapped in utopian visions of urban living that is intentionally and explicitly changing the idea of the big city from one of an inclusive cosmopolis governed by its habitants through local municipal government to a fragmented ensemble of 'privatopia' managed by corporations (McKenzie, 1996; Harvey, 2000). This development also creates private, gated enclaves housing residential, creating spatial segregation. This spatial segregation can be classified as 'self-segregation' or 'voluntary segregation'. It will continue and is inevitable, resulting from the socioeconomic and political conditions of the urban society. As Firman (2004) argued, the demand for a new town has been essentially generated by the need for security and a fulfiling exclusive lifestyle, while innovation has been able to sell an image of the private city as a symbol of 'modernism'. There are three types of gated communities, including lifestyle communities, prestige communities, and security zone communities, whereas those in Southeast Asia reflect a mixture of societal needs, modern design ideas, and capitalist imperatives (Leisch, 2000).

This study's findings also highlight the importance of good planning and housing policy. It provides direction to housing development in the country, emphasising human settlement philosophy by providing social services and amenities, and economic activities necessary to attain a better quality of life, national integration, and unity (Ramli, 2020). In addition, as public policy undergoes constant changes and modifications, having a sound foundation on public policy can lead to better judgement and decision-making (Karim, 2021). The case study of this research was Greater Jakarta, even though the phenomena of private cities also apply to other Southeast Asian countries, the difference based on local context and housing problem still affects each country differently. This would be a fruitful area for further work. Finally, it is necessary for future papers to answer the question of whether and to what extent private cities can be regarded as a model for sustainable urban expansion in Southeast Asia in the future.

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All authors contributed to the design of the research, the questionnaire, and the write-up. The on-line survey, data cleaning and tabulation was undertaken by researcher. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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