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## **Commons people: managing music and culture in contemporary Yogyakarta**

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## CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I return to the notion of sustainability as a way to interrogate the implementation of vision and plans in managing the music commons. The reality of music commons in this research shows that it takes more effort to find a common purpose for working together. It leads to a question about the imagination of collective that a project has. The imagined commons is informed by the imagination of the collective and the capacities which emerge from it. And, this imagination of the collective is sometimes limited. Within this limitation however, the projects narrated here involve participation of various people—whether artists, curators, writers, fans, or family members. They are enthusiastic and seek to be supportive of one another. Sustainability emerges as a focus through which the people that I am researching find justification for working together with the other people.

Plans are not fixed; they are always changing. A project might be the materialization of dreams and plans and they serve as a medium to rehearse particular ideas. There are many moments which lead to break-ups and abandonment. Friction feels real and endless. Collaboration can end easily; and there might not be enough reasons to patch things up. Sustainability is a work in progress. To reach a sustainable condition is to acknowledge moments of break-ups and abandonments, and to allow opportunities for repairing relations.

The activists of the Indonesian Net Label Union are busy getting on with their own lives. When my fieldwork was officially ended, the second Indonesian Net Audio Festival that I attended in the end of 2014 was the last festival that the union organized. Wok is increasingly busy with his role as an artist and curator. Wok has been busy with curating Nusasonic, a series of music and sound performances for CTM—Festival for Adventurous Music and Art. The festival took place in Berlin, in January 2019. Tinta has taken on a new role as a prominent activist of 'street-walking' through the founding of Manic Street Walker – a club that she initiated in Surabaya. The club organizes regular tours to different parts of the city and she advocates walking as a practice to reclaim the cultural ownership of the city and to reimagine the map of the city differently. Tinta seems to have more opportunities to travel to various places in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, and Japan. She has traveled for various purposes and represented different organizations—Indonesian Net Label Union, *Manic Street Walkers*, and recently *Pertigaan Map*, which

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means, a map formed in a junction. Hilman has left Jogja for Jakarta to work for Creative Commons Indonesia. This job combines his expertise in law, copyright, and net label practices. Nonetheless, he still has time to release new albums through his net label, Ear Alert Records. Arie is still managing Mindblasting and maintaining his day job at a hospital in Purworejo. Arie Mindblasting and other *anak noise* are still diligently producing collaboration albums with local and foreign musicians. Some parts of this noise group have also been active in organizing tours in other countries in the region.

Mira spent a year in the Netherlands (2016-2017) to pursue a curatorial course at De Appel in Amsterdam. Sandi moved to Ubud, Bali, to pursue a new career, which combined his yoga teaching skills and managing an arts residency. Sandi occasionally visited Jogja, and when he did, he organized various events at Lir Space. In 2018, Mira was in Italy doing another long-term residency. Dito, Mira's husband, and other people, were managing Lir Space while she was away. Lir Space's Instagram account indicated that the gallery functions normally even though some of their main staff had been away. The gallery still held exhibitions, the library was being added to and there seems to be a new video program for the public.

Yoyok sent me some photographs showing the room of his cassette collection. He has a set of book cupboards with doors neatly installed on both sides of the room. Yoyok's family's library has finally been built. I wonder whether he sometimes invites his neighbors, friends and relatives to visit and enjoy the collection.

Nirmana Records released their second vinyl production, *Greatest Pledges Articles*, by Dom 65, in December 2017. According to Hahan, the vinyl has not sold very well, and, he has not decided on what to produce next. But Nirmana Records is just one part of Hahan's work in the arts. As with many others, he has a variety of projects to work on. He manages various activities in Ace House Collective, in collaboration with his wife (as of May 2018), Gintani, Uma, and other colleagues. Hahan has been busy with numerous exhibitions in Indonesia and elsewhere. For example, he was invited to participate in the National Gallery of Victoria's Triennial (December 2017-April 2018). I met Hahan and Gintani in Melbourne during his exhibition period and I also helped him with interpreting for his artist talk.

In a limited sense, a *skena* (scene) can also mean a space, where a project is

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happening. The people behind a space are always related to other spaces. A space needs to be contextualized in its relational position with other spaces. The Indonesian Net Label Union is linked with various net labels and other cultural initiatives of which its members are a part. In the same way, the organization of Walk the Folk and Nirmana Records partly depends on the exhibition projects, residencies, and researches that Mira and Hahan are doing. The Indonesian Net Label Union, Walk the Folk, and Nirmana Records, are collective projects, which depend on the dynamics of the personal projects of their activists. In this case, a personal project serves as a space where new ideas are developed and new methods for doing something are learnt. And when the time has come to perform in Indonesian Net Label Union, Walk the Folk, or Nirmana Records, the new ideas or methods can be practiced. A collective project is a space where thoughts of different people are united. As such, the people are always dispersed through other projects. The people that I talked with in this research are used to the dispersal of collaborators, and to work together in various modes.

In December 2017, Mira curated a new site-specific art project in Kaliurang called *900mdpl*. The description of the project reads like a combination of *The Kaliurang Project* and *Walk the Folk*. This project serves as a continuation of the Walk the Folk project and it also indicates a nature of the project that enables improvisation. Mira explains as follows:

900mdpl is an extensive site-specific art project in Kaliurang, a small village on the southern slope of an active volcano, Mt. Merapi. Kaliurang is an hour away from the city of Yogyakarta with average altitude of 900 meters above sea level. Historically, it was built as a resort area for Dutch geologist during colonial period. It continues to be a popular resort area due to its milder temperature and relish its heyday until the end of the New Order era. 900mdpl aims to respond to the space, collect stories, and revisit local wisdoms while promoting on knowledge exchange and community engagements with the locals through collaborative projects. 900mdpl consists of two parts: first, the residency period resulting in different solo projects by each of the artists; second, the grand project presentation of all artists at scattered sites around Kaliurang where wider audience will be guided on the exhibition walking route. In this exhibition, walking is a crucial method of spatial practice. For the artists, walking is the research methodolo-

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gy in developing their artistic projects. For the audience, walking is the act of activating the place and turns it into a space of experience: weaving together the narration in each sites presented by the artist. 900mdpl is projected to be a seed of a continuous platform of a site-specific art project, offering a space of possibilities. During the exhibition, a map and weekly guided walking tours with the curator and artists are provided for the audience. A series of workshops and public programs presented by the collaborating artists will also be available for the local community during the two weeks of the exhibition.

In December 2018, Lir Space lost their rented space. On their Instagram account (@lirspace), they announced that, "After 8 years of running Lir Space as an independent art space, we decided to work in a nomadic form. By mid 2019, Lir Space will fully turn into Lir curator-artist collective, working in a nomadic manner with no permanent address. We produce temporary exhibitions, exchange programs, curatorial projects, site specific and artistic works within different venue, institutions, and off spaces here and there." Lir's new venture suggests that the physicality of space is important but it is not everything. It provides insights into a new layer to the meaning of sustainability. The chapters throughout the dissertation show the focus of sustainability on access, participation, and memory. Lir's new venture suggests a sense of discontinuity and continuity at the same time. Sustainability can mean an ongoing condition for the sustainability of ideas.

My journal article on net labels, "Limit of sharing and materialization of support: Indonesian Net Label Union" has been published in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Journal*, and has led to another contact with the people of the union. They have told me that they are planning another Indonesian Net Audio Festival later this year.

In August 2018, I went to Jogja for work and a family visit. My visit coincided with the third edition of the Indonesian Net Audio Festival. Wok approached me to see whether I could contribute to a panel in the festival. The festival was conducted in Jogja National Museum. Taking "Sharing over Netizen Explosion" as the main theme, the festival was renamed Indonesian Net Audio Forum. Compared to the previous festivals, the recent festival has a stronger music program, workshops, and artist talks. It has more diverse activities such as cooking demonstrations, media art exhibitions, and a pop-up market.

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The main reason behind this expansion was thanks to funding from the Japan Foundation.

The panel of the festival was designed as a performative talk. The theme of the panel was "Mapping the Undercurrents." The panel description states that the talk intends to discuss the interlinking of the Internet with digital technology as the energies to amplify the production of hoax and new local knowledge. It contributes to the development of new infrastructure of production and distribution. I was tasked to discuss about my newly published journal article. I shared the panel with Manshur Zikri of Forum Lenteng, Jakarta, who talked about art, media, and hoax. Irfan Darajat of Laras, talked about *dangdut koplo*, live performances, and piracy. Dina of Kunci moderated the panel. During the event, I met Tinta, Arie Mindblasting, and Hilman, again. They helped the organization of the festival. For the purpose of the festival, Arie and Hilman asked permission from their bosses to be absent from work.

How long does a *skena* last? It lasts as long as there is a conducive environment to maintain the *skena* and the thinking behind it alive. In order to make it happen, there must be a condition where learning and experimenting are made possible. My research shows that learning and experimenting emerged as opportunities to learn, reflect, and experiment; and these opportunities come unpredicted. But such opportunities can be available if there is a deliberate attempt to make them available.

I recall my conversation with Wok regarding 'Save Lokananta' or 'Sahabat Lokananta' campaigns. According to Wok, if one would like to show support to Lokananta, he or she should consider working there, to becoming a Lokananta staff and dealing the daily problems that the company might have. Otherwise a campaign attempt would not bring about any fundamental changes. I want to extend the meaning of real, tangible act, *nyata*, to the availability of collaborators for working together. In the case of Indonesian Net Label Union, Tinta, Arie, and Hilman, are examples of long-time comrades who seem to be always ready to work for the union. They are *real*, because they also see their works in the union as a form of long-term commitment.

In chapter five, Hahan and Uma reflected on their practices in managing Ace House Collective and Nirmana Records as part of an educative process. They are learning about how to manage an art space through developing their art

space, Ace House Collective. They are learning about a record company, and producing particular sound, through developing their record company, Nirmana Records. In managing Ace House Collective and Nirmana Records, they are gaining a sense of authority and confidence in engaging with art and culture. For them, being 'amateurs' is as important as the vision of what they want to do.

The scope of all the projects examined in this research is limited. The discussion in chapter one is about infrastructure of personal access to cultural materials in an urban setting. Thoughts about copying and piracy are manifested in the development of Burn Your Idol project. Burn Your Idol is an art project, which serve as a repository of public music collection. Though Burn Your Idol is an online-based project, which allows wide participation from music fans; it largely circulates within the domain of visual art.

The membership of Indonesian Net Label Union is open to the public. But a net label is a distribution platform, which is adopted by music practitioners who reside mainly in Java. Based on my observation, the activities of the union are centered on Java. However, to follow the cosmopolitan character of its activists, the conversation about the union can take place in an international-artists-exchange-setting. The union activists took part in *Media Culture in Asia: A Transnational Platform* in Tokyo, in early February. But this only happens when there are opportunities to make it happen. Walk the Folk is a site-specific project, which centered on Kaliurang. This might be a project that Mira discussed about during one of her curatorial residencies abroad. Yoyok created a family library—based on his cassette collection. The library is located in his house. Nirmana Records only produced a small number of records. Although many music fans anticipate their sound production, the circulation of their records remains small. I start the discussion about Lokananta Records with a reflection about Save Lokananta—an online campaign to raise awareness to Lokananta. The online character suggests the wide character of the campaign. The campaign managed to open up a public discussion, or rather concerns, about the future of Lokananta Records. But the determination of such campaign is being tested in a specific site, Lokananta Records in Solo.

Hahan and Uma have been busy working for a long-term project, Arisan Tenggara, a residency program and collaboration platform for artist collectives in Southeast Asia. The name of the project is a nod to arisan as a



traditional model of community development through saving.<sup>52</sup> Uma has been involved in Kunci's *Sekolah Salah Didik*, or School of Improper<sup>53</sup> Education as a temporary student. During his participation in the project, Uma and Kunci as the school organizer developed an audio-based project called *Nguping Records*. *Nguping* is both a Javanese and Indonesian word for listening. The project emphasizes *budaya telinga*, or ear culture. To follow the project description, "the ear culture refers to a learning activity which is adapted from transmission and knowledge exchange rooted in the oral culture." The idea of music, to follow the project, is extended as "everything that can be listened to." The project aims to release various audio archives generated by various independent cultural organizations in Jogja and present them as "a music album."<sup>54</sup> This audio project might represent a new trajectory to explore in the making of commons. The people in this research seem to think about the production of new projects.

To reflect on this, I go back to the notion of 'emergency activism' proposed by Budianta (2003). Budianta depicts the climate of the immediate post-1998 environment as an emergency situation and the cultural activists to take place in the period as part of 'an emergency activism.' Their activities were conducted to fill in holes in the environment. At the same time, emergency implies the short-lived nature of the activities. It is the kind of fast activism,

52 *Arisan* is a popular community-based savings association in Indonesia. Amid various ways of savings and credit facilitated by modern banking platforms, *arisan* proves to be a sustaining mechanism for accumulating money (see Geertz 1962, Papanek and Schwede 1988, Henley 2009). Arisan-like mechanism exists in different cultural context across the region (see Hope 1993, Shanmugam 1991), and is used as a springboard for developing a collaboration platform in this project. In this project, Ace House Collective works together with Jogja-based collectives—Krack! Studio, Lifepatch, Ruang Gulma, Ruang Mes 56, and Survive! Garage. During the project, they served as hosts for other organizations in Southeast Asia—Tentacles (Bangkok), Tanah Indie (Makassar), WSK! (Manila), Rumah Api (Kuala Lumpur), Rekreatif (Dili), and Gembel Art Collective (Dili). Further information about the project can be obtained through its Instagram account--@arisantenggara.

53 Sekolah Salah Didik (SSD), or School of Improper Education, is Kunci's experiment on 'school' as a platform to inquiry into the economic sustainability of an organization—in material and immaterial senses. We appropriate the idea of school as a garden of ideas, a laboratory of affect, and a space where new ideas collide and merge. Further information about the school practices can be obtained here: <http://sekolah.kunci.or.id/?lang=id>

54 In what follows, I present some basic explanations of the project—1) "Nguping Records aims to operate some basic ideas through releasing the audio archives that might hidden in the drawers of an organization or individual and present them as 'music' albums. Our initiative intends to extend the meaning of music not as the product of composition of vocal disharmony or sound instruments, but grasping its simple understanding, everything that can be listened to"; 2) Albums released by Nguping Records is compiled through various data of audio archives derived from various events—open/closed discussions, interviews, lectures, internal meetings, dramatic readings, soundscape of an event, or public performance. We will select and compile these audio archives with a set of loose categorisations—by time, topics, and methods. Our 'curatorial' is adapted from the development of mixtape and playlist making, which is made easier by digital technology. While mixtape traces personal routes in listening practices and understanding music, through presenting such audio archives, we are interested in reconstructing speculative relations from various oral (our mouth)-based raw knowledge material." Further information about Nguping Records can be obtained through <http://sekolah.kunci.or.id/> and the following Instagram accounts--@cikunci, @uma\_dua, and @ngupingrekaman.

which set to fill in certain holes with meaningful things. Various cultural projects in this research serve as a meeting point between the people from Generation 98 and post-Generation 98. In the introduction chapter, I have discussed an alternative space as a mechanism to fill in holes in post-Reformasi Indonesia.

From one project to another, they are all regarded as important. They convey different measures to make sense of the current condition. Each project represents one hole that has been filled in. But once a hole is filled in, there seems to be another or more holes appearing in a different social setting. Or rather, once certain holes have been filled in, we began to see other kinds of holes surfacing from beneath. What would one define a transient period that seems to last for a long time? We live to fill in holes. And, perhaps it is the holes that define us. We assume different roles and responsibilities, often in hyperactive manner. In other words, we are striving for life.

During my last visit to Jogja (August 2018), I went to Ace House Collective to meet Hahan and Uma. We spoke in the living room of the collective's rented house. As part of their *Ace Mart* project, a pop-up shop to sell groceries and popular artworks during Ramadhan, the living room was transformed into a temporary supermarket. I walked behind the house, and saw a row of *kamar kos*, rented rooms. The rooms are rented by the people who work in café and bars around Jalan Parangtritis. Hahan said that he rented two rooms—one for the office, and another allocated for 'a residency room.' The latter is designed for an artist-in-residence who comes to Ace House Collective or other organizations in the city.

I walked in to the pavilion that used by Ace House to exhibit the works of the collective members. They named the gallery *Juara Dunia*, the World Champion. When I walked out of the gallery, I saw *Seni juga butuh istirahat*, which means art needs some rest too, written on the pavilion wall. When Ace Mart opened for the first time in 2017, the supermarket was open 24 hours. It was open 24 hours to the convenience of the fellow art workers who often work 24 hours. I perceive it as a nod to the busyness, or state of feeling busy, a familiar condition to many art and cultural activists. Hahan acknowledged that it was fun to have a shop which is open 24 hours per day. But then everyone got sick, because working 24 hours is such hard work, he said. This is how the idea of writing "art needs some rest too" came.

The phrase “art needs some rest too” provides insights into the nature of making commons practices. The projects narrated in this research can be regarded as fast activism. There is a sense of emergency attached to it. However, the people are taking pauses, *istirahat*, in the musicking process. Some pauses are short. Some other pauses can be long.

My research has explored the different ways sustainability works through making visible intentions, fiddles, doubts, and vulnerabilities. To undergo sustainability works means to envisage new tools, and new directions, for ‘keeping going’, to follow the words of Graham and Thrift (2007: 3) with the intended plans and ensuring the continuity of the everyday. Sometimes an activity was stopped, and being in a phase where things seemed unclear, then moved towards a different phase where it was started all over again. The process could be slow, or was paced in accords with the condition of supporting resources. Here being ‘slow’ does not mean to slow down. But rather that there is a sense of persistence in it. It reminds me of a Javanese phrase, *alon-alon waton kelakon*, which roughly translates as ‘slowly but surely.’<sup>55</sup> It is something, which also resembles a ‘slow burning process.’

To what extent does a cultural project bring some effect on the cultural environment? A further question is whether the effect is short-term or long-term, and whether a project might have a wider impact on the wider environment outside Jogja. My research has been about small-scale, low-key music projects. Perhaps, the definition of ‘to be useful’ is to show care towards a specific part of the environment – i.e. the closest, most immediate context. The usefulness of something should not be limited to scale and scope. The people in this research create a model of platform for cultural practices. The formats of the platforms examined in this research are not new. But they have been developed with different framing. In taking action to organize them, the people narrated here are taking different measures to make sense of the current condition, and develop their own ways of making values. The character of the platform is general, but it is something that can be repurposed and imitated in a different social context. This is the premise on which the long-term impact of the works of the people in this research can be concluded.

55 Arya Panjalu, a Yogyakarta-based visual artist and the vocalist of a punk band called *Black Boots* created an installation and performance work to base on this phrase. He roamed the streets of Jogja on a bicycle with special tire, which is a slow act of pedaling the vehicle, would print the words ‘Pelan-pelan aku akan sampai’, an Indonesian translation of a Javanese phrase, *alon-alon waton kelakon*.