



Cities to be tamed? Standards and alternatives
in the transformation of the urban South
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Collective activity as a traditional knowledge behind the physical design. Case of urban *kampungs* in indonesia

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A domain of kampung (informal settlement) is playing a dominant role in Indonesian urban development. Despite their unorganised and spontaneous settlements, kampungs take part in shaping the character of a city and bring a dynamic sense in urbanisation.

It investigates how the existence of urban kampung is designed through a traditional collective activity which is proof of local knowledge through generations, known as gotong-royong; an Indonesian term for traditional voluntarily mutual act where the result is equally benefited.

Yet, the collective activity is not only the matter of community, but also involves other stakeholders. It emphasises the partnership between kampung community and the government, but it is questionable whether gotong-royong can function, since the government has different perspectives and approach in the matter of power holder. Can this traditional approach function as an alternative to tame the informal city through creating 'an appropriate urban kampung'?

Keywords: traditional collective activity, gotong-royong, urban kampung, partnership, Indonesia

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Characteristics of urban *kampung*s in Indonesia

Urban *kampung*s are unique settlements and comprise some 70 per cent of the big cities in Indonesia and play a dominant role in urban development. Inevitably *kampung*s are a part of urban settlements.

A *Kampung* is favoured and constitute real-estate settlement, because to live in a *kampung*, one does not need to accomplish a long complicated procedure with spending much money. A house can be built without standardisation and does not fit the state-sanctioned code. Both to live and to build a house in *kampung*, one has to reach an agreement with other residents in the neighbourhood which occurs without legal status instead of formal process.

Historically, *kampung*s haven existed since about 600 centuries during Hindu civilisation until today, though their development depends on political, economical and social transformation in urban development. The existence of *kampung* related to urbanisation and its transformative process can be observed through different aspects. They are either a result of rural migration or changes traditional forms of rural to urban social life where the push and pull factors between rural and urban play a significance roles (Geertz 1965).

Physically, a *kampung* is the living settlements for low income class with poor physical condition (Rutz 1987), but it is not compared to a slum or squatter (Baros 1980). It is described as a settlement with high density, poor deprived environment, provided with rudimentary if it is not lack of infrastructure and services (Steinberg 1992). *Kampung*s can be located either on vulnerable places (i.e. flooded and landslide areas), vacant land, on the riverbank, or along railway tracks.

Based on the social class, the urban *kampung* community is heterogeneous, between low to the low-middle income. *Kampung*'s life is marked by strong bonding among the residents because they still carry their habit of rural life which is related to the close familial ties. Yet, culturally, the background is diversely, since they can come from all regions of the Indonesian archipelago. Otherwise, *kampung* residents have various occupations; from informal street vendors and housemaids to teachers and civil servants, from working in manufactures to governmental offices (Herbasuki 1984 and Sullivan 1992).

Today urban *kampung*s supply cities with informal sectors. Hence, in Indonesia neither urban nor *kampung*s can merely stand alone; mutualism between them takes place (Amirrol 2011). This is a unique condition since on the one hand *kampung*s are often 'an obstacle' for the urban authority because they occupy prohibited land to settle. A *kampung* is identical to unofficial, irregular, less bureaucratic systems, whereas a city has regulation, authority, control, and is organised. So, due to the government, *kampung*s are marginal and informal. On the other hand without their existence, urban dynamic will be disturbed. From the point of *kampung* habitants, to immigrate to city is a common hope to improve their lives.

Traditional collective activity known as *gotong-royong*

Since centuries a traditional collective activity has existed as a cultural heritage and a local knowledge through generations which is called *gotong-royong*. Originally it is a Javanese word. *Gotong* means to carry and *royong* collectively.

Gotong-royong as the term for mutual self-help indicates that an activity/task is manifested voluntary and spontaneous. Characteristics of *gotong-royong* are reflected by loyalty and based on a sense of belongingness, a collective consciousness, a willingness to share a burden, a strong solidarity, and a sense of community, which shows harmony in society (Flor 2001, Surtiono and Newman 1999).

Gotong-royong is born out of reciprocal principles according to their respective capabilities to reach a certain target, and the result is equally benefited. So, related to reciprocity, to help and expect to be helped is a mutual obligation between people knowing and needing each other. As collective society individuals are



expected to toe to the line to the principles of the society and the in-groups to which they belong (based on Hofstede's dimensions of national culture).²

As a part of the Indonesian cultures, this traditional collective activity is based on unwritten traditional rules. It is taking place if all participants understand and commit to the rule of the game how it functions. Thus, in order to understand a collective action it is crucial to understand its social context via the common knowledge generating process that underlies it, otherwise with their absence the game will not occur (Rao 2005). Relationship harmony is important to be maintained and solidarity has priority, so that conflicts are as possible avoided. If there are, conflicts are solved through compromise, negotiation or using a third party as mediator. Moreover, who disobeyed, it was believed that s/he would get material and spiritual sanctions (Larasati 2007). Activities of the traditional collective activity mostly take place in rural areas with nearly homogenous social environment. In urban areas *gotong-royong* occurs much more intensive in the lower social class. It is an emphasis on everyday life which is reflected by loyalty and cohesiveness within family and work units, since individuals belong to a family and the family is a basic unit of society (Wirawan and Irawanto 2007, compared also to Howell 2007). The activities are i.e. cleaning the neighbourhood environment or improving local paths, through helping in a case of death in the neighbourhood, or planned to build a community-building or if a resident in a neighbourhood needs work to be done for her/his house. The tasks are mostly in terms of material needs. Nevertheless, *gotong-royong* does not always mean that communication among people occurs every day, yet they are ready to do something together if they are asked.

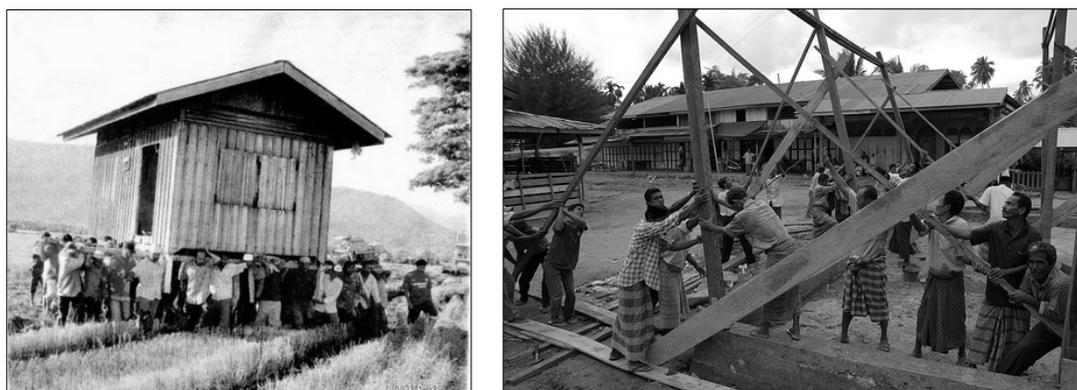


Figure 1 *Gotong-royong* as a traditional collective activity. Source: Sudarman, 2011 and Sai, 2009

Gotong-royong as a collective action is actually not only practiced in Indonesian. Such of collective activity is practiced ditto by several countries, such as *Bayaniban* in the Philippines, *Dugnad* in Norwegian, *Naffir* in Sudan, etc. (see Wikipedia about *gotong-royong* 2011).

Physical design and social product through collective activity in urban kampungs

Generally the existence of *kampungs* is marginalised and *kampung* dwellers have to carry out their needs by their own capacity and respective self-help, they are used to struggling and have capability to survive in middle of a crisis. To accommodate this capability, collective activity is an important tool to implement it.

² Geert Hofstede distinguished countries from each other into four clusters, i.e. individualism vs. collectivism (IDV)

One experience is shown by a *kampung* renovation project in Surabaya. Surabaya is the second largest city in Indonesia with a population of over 2.7 million (5.6 million in the metropolitan area). As the capital of the province of East Java, Surabaya is an important industrial and commercial centre in the eastern region of Indonesia. To promote the city as an international trade centre the government prompted beautification programmes which ultimately threaten the livelihoods of the poor, including unorganised and informal settlements like *kampungs*. Some *kampungs* are legalised through *Kampung* Improvement Programmes, but others are threatened to be demolished and the dwellers relocated. One of the threatened *kampung* was *kampung Strenkali* in Surabaya.

The *kampung* which consisted of 3,000 families was on the area of the delimitation of settlement of the river (*strenkali*) regarded as a dirty region and endangered to pollute the river; therefore the local government had planned to relocate the residents. Instead, through solidarity based on their strong bonding to the settlement unified them to struggle for renovating their houses through some actions.

The *kampung* residents persisted to keep living there because the *kampung* has already existed more than 40 years where some of them have been living for generations. They have jobs close to the location with most of them working in the informal sectors. Moreover, according to the study by community executed with help from an NGO and a university, the river pollution was not mainly caused by the community but rather from several factories disposing chemical contamination and solid waste. To defend their settlements and to persist to keep living there, the riverside community used the *gotong-royong* strategy.

To change government policy from relocation to renovation, the communities formed a group dynamic namely *paguyuban* (social organisasion) called Paguyuban Warga Strenkali Surabaya (PWS or Riverside Community Organisation); a half formal Indonesian association since it is only notarised. This organisation is formed to response to riverside eviction threats which began in 2002 with concrete actions in the negotiation process between riverside community and the government, i.e. to propose a technical approach of the riverside. The government planned to make concrete V-shaped riversides to prevent future flooding (Figure A). They stipulated that a 12-15 meters space should be created between the riversides and the settlements to provide better access for regular cleaning. This would demolish more than 3.000 houses. Yet, the technical study from the riverside community showed if the river were deepened with vertical riversides, only three to five meters would be needed on each side to allow river cleaners to pass (Figure B). Therefore, the communities would only need to vacate manageable amounts of space between their houses and the river. From that design it can be find out that a *kampung* community does know the best about their settlement. Beside they can still live there, the riverbank is also able to be cleaned from the river side.

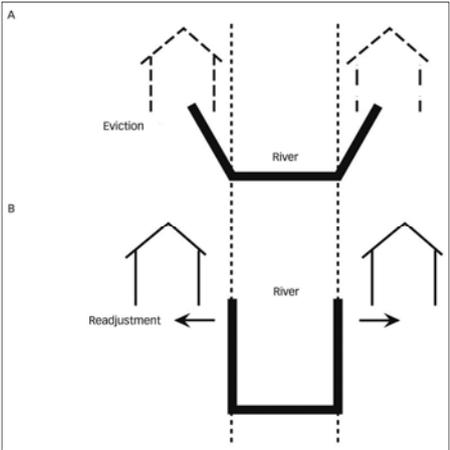


Figure 2. Government vs. paguyuban Warga Strenkali Surabaya (PWS) models. Source: Some, 2009



Figure 3. Before and after renovation. Source: Pudyanto, 2009 and Kusworo, 2009

The wider impacts of community organising is a better physical environment, for example from a crowded to a clean and green location. Socially, the riverside community has organised many activities to build positive public opinion, such as once a year they organise traditional ceremonies that are open to the public, to show that they are part of the river and must honour it.

Empowerment mechanisms in the group over the years are achieved through ‘internal and external activities’. Some ‘internal activities’ such as saving, making handicraft from recycling materials, children activities were organised through *gotong-royong*, in order to strengthen the communities themselves. These activities were financed through the organised saving groups and moreover community members could gather regularly which creates solidarity among them. The savings programme was established besides for household finances and income generating, also for housing renovations. Savings can bring people much closer and meet each other regularly and to tie them creating negotiating power to face bureaucratic regulations. Through the community saving, women were more organised and have more power and were active in organising. They do organise daily expenditure and through regular meeting they exchange and distribute information and from outside as well so that they also have the same knowledge as men. Whereas, ‘external activities’, like doing offensive through demonstrations, rallies and using the press to have their voice broadly heard, were arranged as well. Practice shows that the conduct of environmental communication requires time and flexibility, so to proceed at its own pace since participation takes time (Flor 2001).

The idea of this empowerment mechanism is to strengthen the communities themselves since this is their own struggle of the riverside community without direct support from the city administration. This is also the way to gather and to organise people, to create solidarity, and to foster trust among community. Instead of staying passive and crying: ‘*Help us because we are poor*’ they were active to improve themselves and shouting ‘*Listen, we have this problem and here is a possible solution*’. The result, since the communities are closer, they have good opportunity to learn about laws, planning and architecture. Through this social activity the *kampung* residents can share their problems to each other and attain better feeling of taking care between neighbours which in Western mind may be something uncommon (Malau and Pennells 2008).³

The whole process of that housing renovation project evolved out of geographic area, since an eviction of the riverbank settlement could bring serious social and political consequences to the city, destroying the social foundations within urban society; for example between communities in that *kampung* and other residents along the rivers and other city dwellers through the economic needs and dependency of city on informal sectors. The results of the project benefit not only the *kampung*’s residents but also more to establish social stability through maintaining to clean the river by the community (Some et al. 2009).

³ Those participatory collective actions occur through communication and social mobilisation is verified as well by Flor 2001.

Yet, on the wider level, the result of the housing renovation project echoed beyond their thematic range to a greater scale with other situations. What the community had achieved through working together as a local organisation influenced other locations with other environmental concerns, such as natural and man-made disasters to follow this project.⁴ The resonance brought also a large coalition of several community organisations, NGOs and the government to come to an agreement about commitment to the environment.

Partnership between kampung community and the government

From the above renovation project we can see that only to be active among community is not enough. The project involves different parties outside the community itself. To support activities and attain their objectives the *kampung* community worked together with other parties.

During the project process the community organisation was advocated by the UPC (Urban Poor Consortium, an Indonesia-based non-profit and non-governmental organisation, dealing i.e. with community organisation for housing rights and eviction, urban poverty and urban environment) and supported by Misereor (the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation). They were also assisted by some universities, research units, advocacy and law groups. From experiences, however, the *kampung* community found out that it is important to work with partner organisations that understand the history and process of their struggle and effort during the project and to let them being independent.

This paper emphasises on participation between community and the government. By comparing to NGOs there is almost strain between them because of different approach, perspectives and needs, since community tends to come from bottom-up approach in the matter of non authority and the government from top-down of authority. Partnership between those actors can be accomplished if the government who has political power allows and gives community freedom to decide their own problem, as long as agreement reached between them functioned. So, it is a challenge for both parties to commit a win-win solution, which is normally the result of negotiation from both sides. Thus, cooperation with formal institution such as the government needs regularity and continuity that people have to discuss and bargain frequently. Otherwise, it is questionable as well how the traditional collective activity functions, as soon as other party involves and moreover in the level of urban area, such as the urban government, whether traditional term of *gotong-royong* that based on loyalty, solidarity, voluntary, or reciprocity is able to occur in partnership between community and the government.

Related to the project in Surabaya, partnership between riverside community and the government takes place only after a tough negotiation process about the agreement of the riverside. After a long struggle (2002-2008), persistent and both physical and social activities based on *gotong-royong* of lower social class can influence and let themselves be heard. The communities could convince the regional parliament to legalise the squatters with compromises that the residents keep distance between their huts and the river, no more new building and not contaminate the river. That was the first time in Indonesia that a regulation was established with three parties; the government, parliament and community. The city parliament as the third party is needed because different perceptions and technical approaches between the riverside community organisation and the city administration were difficult to negotiate. So, the city parliament was required as mediator and a respective judge. More detail about this best-practice project see Some et al. 2009, Deutschlandfunk 2008, and Youtube 2010.

⁴ To mention some, see some activities based on *gotong-royong* in the recovery process after disaster in Yogyakarta 2011, International Recovery Platform 2010, and Recovery Status Report 2006.

The collective activity does not function well in partnership if there are obstacles from both a community and the government sides. From a community side if there is lack of clear information about problems they face to and information about chances they can achieve through *gotong-royong*, as well as lack of motivation and how to mobilise the community to move together. Moreover, a psychological factor is a challenge for community in implementing *gotong-royong*, if they face difficulties and stress both from internal and external sides. Therefore the commitment of a community organisation to motivate its members and to keep togetherness is essential.

An obstacle from the institution side is if *gotong-royong* is only a one-off process instead a precedent instrument. Another obstacle is if collective activity is manipulated as a political purpose from the state for example during government election. Thus, participation of the *kampung* inhabitants is more symbolic. Instead of their own welfare to living sustainable in urban *kampung*, they are indoctrinated with different slogans, only during the election (Arnstein 1969).

Traditional collective activity as an alternative to tame the informal city?

To create the collective activity as an option to tame the informal city, first of all we have to be clear about some points which can be an obstacle in utilising the traditional collective activity, but also as a lesson learned.

Application of the term gotong-royong

This term is often abused beyond its original sense as collective action in political, economic and social spheres. According to Magnus-Suseno and Koentjaraningrat in Yumarma 1996, *gotong-royong* was used as a central part of a national development strategy. Communities, in turn, were expected to provide volunteer labor, building materials and money for use with central government transfers (see also Kobbe 2007, Okten and Osili 2007). In 1960 there was *Gotong-royong* Parliament, during the New Order era⁵ *gotong-royong* had been 'fossilised' by sloganeering, and in 2001-2004 the Indonesian cabinet also used the name *Gotong-royong* Cabinet (mutual assistance Cabinet) [see Wikipedia about *gotong-royong* and mutual assistance cabinet]. In modern time, related to economic factors, where urban development is accelerated by rapid economic growth, *gotong-royong* for the sake of togetherness is often misused through individual goals where relationships is based on for example business interests instead of on emotional bonds. The meaning of *gotong-royong* has been twisted and does not survive well with human being's effort to pursue comfort and the continuation of personal life, since solidarity, fraternity, and the spirit of camaraderie surrender and is shifted by materials (see Hikam 2010 and Wijaya 2011). Several foreign institutions have used this word for a competition with a topic '*gotong-royong* city' that the spirit of *gotong-royong* is interpreted into physical urban and architectural design (e-architect 2009).

Moreover, the term *gotong-royong* was often used for humanitarian activities by international institutions (NGOs) in providing relieve after disasters, such as tsunami, in rebuilding infrastructure although the proper application in the project is doubtful and if it was, *gotong-royong* was more a slogan to accelerate realisation of the projects on location. Some examples of recovery project after Tsunami in Aceh in 2004 or in Yogyakarta 2006 see Hendra 2005 and Grootenhuis 2007.

Function of traditional collective activity between community and society in Indonesia

Collective activity seems to be implemented rather on the level of community instead of society.

⁵ The New Order is the term coined by the Indonesian governance system during 1966 and 1998. Since 1998 until today Indonesia is in the era called Reformation era.

Different to the West, in Indonesia where it is less individualistic, neighbourhood is categorised as 'community' instead of 'society'. Without starting to build relationship with adjacent neighbours, if someone comes and lives in a settlement, s/he is already part of the community of the neighbourhood and 'committed' to participate in *gotong-royong*. The sense of community is stronger than of society and is inherent in Indonesians since generations. The feeling of bonding, togetherness, solidarity, equality and similarities in common has existed already. Yet, inside (family and) community where a regular relationship is taking place, consensus, moral behaviour, etiquettes and mutual obligation help (obligation to help and expect to be helped) is more upheld, that if it is violated, s/he will face rather moral sanctions from the neighbourhood than formal consequences. Here *gotong-royong* can take place. On the other hand the Indonesians pay less attention to the meaning of society with written rules and generality, such as traffic regulations or queuing up (Sekarani 2009 and Mayra 2010).

Nonetheless, the functioning and effectiveness of realisation of *gotong-royong* are also influenced by household variables, the distribution of benefits across social and economic groups, and the quality of community leadership, as remarked by Bowen (1986) and Warren (1993) (see Okten and Osili (no date), Abdillah 2011, Rao 2005, and Wikipedia about *Pancasila* 2012).

Hierarchy both in community and the government

It does not matter whether collective activity is accomplished in which level of society, since due to paternal social behaviour, the Indonesian society is dependent on hierarchy between power holders and non power holders. Thus, according to Wirawan and Irawanto (2007), *gotong-royong* has to do with the obligations of the individual toward the community, the propriety of power, and the relation of state authority to traditional social structures.

Hence, from its position both in the community and the society, we can observe that the traditional collective activity on the one hand is a pure mutual-help inherited from the Indonesian culture and originated spontaneously from community itself without interferences, such as people come and help during an event of death in neighbourhood based on own initiatives and solidarity. On the other hand it can be controlled by top-down authoritarian rule or a political interest, for example during annual Independence Day celebration where residents in every neighbourhood are required to clean the environment. This is a decision from a head of urban community unit (RW) as the authority in the lower level of the administration structure in Indonesia, which is in turn it is an order from the authority in the higher level.

That top-down authority takes place since the New Order era. In order to maintain the political and cultural unity of the Indonesian state which has ethnic and religious diversities, the spirit of *gotong-royong* was forced by strongly centralised authoritarian. It was propagated as a collective action which was obligatory to mobilise from head of village in rural areas or head of urban community unit. In the 1970s self-help and mobilising *gotong-royong* were central parts to the implementation of development policy through a uniform system of community organisations, such as a neighbourhood security arrangement (*siskamling*), an irrigation association (*subak*) and neighbourhood health posts (*posyandu*). There was no choice except to participate, otherwise s/he could easily be labeled unpatriotic or uncooperative and consequently face social, political, material, and even physical sanctions (Rao 2005).

In the Reformation era (1998 to present) the authoritarian power has become less centralised and instead more decentralised to the local authority in order to accelerate a project. Local officials are elected by regional committees and observed by watchdogs (kind of ombudsman) drawn from local journalists and NGO workers. Nevertheless, the communication between the government and community should not be

merely instructive, neither merely consultative, nor merely informative, because these can only create force upon community and token obedience to authority. Environmental communication in community participation should not be accomplished by extremely bottom-up approach, since sign of commitment for the community is not clear (Flor 2001, Arnstein 1969, and compare to Winkelmann 2000).

Sustainable gotong-royong

Taking an example of the *kampung* renovation in Surabaya, it is questionable that after the renovation project terminated, whether collective activity in the urban *kampung* would be still ongoing and respectively be maintained sustainable, since the community has achieved its mutual purpose to keep living there and to renovate their houses. Besides, the land value of renovated and legalised settlement may increase and becomes attractive for private sectors to change the land use, or many houses might be rented or sold which causes many new residents that could decrease the feeling of togetherness and further might possibly disintegrate the *gotong-royong* spirit (see Plewes and Stuart 2007).

Another obstacle to sustain the function of collective activity if there is disintegration in the internal affairs of community organisation. It can occur either through failure factors like economic and political issues, such as corruption for personal use (Hendra 2005), political purposes for the credit of individual or certain party, 'money economics' and area expansion for making profit, lack of economic skills and understanding, or income/wealth gap among community members impacting difficulty to mingle and do things together (Larasati 2007). Other factors in social aspects could also restrain success of *gotong-royong*, such as lack of maintenance in the development of a *gotong-royong* organization structure without updating in current situation, degradation of the kinship principle through influence of individual lifestyle and lacking a sense of belonging to collective facilities, and pressure from huge number of group members that cause ineffective efforts.

From these points it can be summarised that as far as the collective activity is not just a slogan and is implemented in the community level, it can be formulated as an alternative to deal with the informal city. Yet, a strong centralised authoritarian approach can impede this ongoing collective mutual help. Changes appear for example after the renovation project is completed and the problems occur in the community organisation, can affect sustainability in implementing the traditional collective activity.

Conclusion

We can distinguish between collective activity in informal and formal conditions. The traditional way of *gotong-royong* about solidarity, voluntary, togetherness, and harmony occurs mostly in **informal** and spontaneous situation inside community itself. Spontaneous *gotong-royong* functions naturally which mean it is not a cash-for-work duty although the expectation to be helped later is culturally distinctive.

Yet, in a formal condition where community is organised to achieve a certain goal and the community needs to collaborate with other parties, thus partnership between community and the government, ex. renovation instead of relocation project, the traditional sense of *gotong-royong* is modified. It means, *gotong-royong* can be no more voluntary and harmonic anymore, but it is executed through negotiation, to pressure government to convince them about equally benefited for both sides, and causes psychological stress.

Related to collective activity in informal situation, in urban area it is more represented by the community low social class. Since the poor have no much choice to obtain their basic needs (i.e. formal housing) unless they join together as a collective unit. *Gotong-royong* among the poor (mostly as worker class and in informal sectors) is stronger in contrast of the situation of the other social classes because as individual



s/he cannot fulfil her/his own basic needs rather as communal. If the poor could improve themselves in a better life, collective activity may decline because togetherness among them is not a requirement anymore. Yet, the fact is, urban poverty will keep continuing as long as city develops and the city has a role as a pull factor for migrants including the poor. For them, due to collectiveness, collective activity is anchored in their life.

Nevertheless, *gotong-royong* is able to exist inside high-middle social class and in the urban society level if there is a necessity to reach a mutual purpose and they have no alternative except doing something together. Continuity of *gotong-royong* is unnecessary once the requirement is fulfilled. For example during riots, because of economic crisis in 1998, suddenly all social level did neighbourhood security arrangement because they have a same purpose to protect themselves from the riots, while hired securities were not able to protect them. Today in the normal and peaceful situation the rich in housing estate areas can run their business individually as usual without depending on collective activity.

Can collective activity be an instrument to tame the city in relation to poverty reduction through creating 'an appropriate urban *kampung*? The collective activity is not a recipe for reducing poverty. If we look back to the case of the riverside *kampung* settlement, maybe the community does not come out completely and directly from poverty, but today they can live without worrying to be evicted or relocated, so that they can work and live properly, and keep maintaining their social life. So, the positive impact of collective activity is beyond the poor themselves. Since they can live properly and have sufficient basic needs, it creates stability and benefits all urban dwellers.

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