

Constructing a Shared Identity: Engaging Youth in Creative Placemaking for Social Integration of Urban Refugees in Indonesia

1. Background

The influx of refugees is becoming a global issue. One in every 113 people is now either an asylum seeker, internally displaced person, or a refugee escaping conflict, violence or human rights violations (UNHCR, 2015). Indonesia, a non-signatory country to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, is also experiencing a rising number of refugees from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and others transiting in its urban areas (UNHCR Indonesia, 2016). In average, refugees spend more than three years in the country while waiting for their settlement application outcome – repatriated to a third country or returned to their origin country. However, the extended waiting period lacks structured programs to bridge the interaction between refugees and locals.

In theory, a low social integration may trigger depression in individuals, and this is even more prominent in young refugees. Adolescence and youth is one of the most crucial stages of human development, when one begins to view himself as a relevant part of society (Erikson, 1968). During this stage, adolescents are increasingly sensitive, reckless, self-conscious, and prone to depression (Hall, 1904). Being in limbo as refugees without a clear path to the future increases these risks. Moreover, they suffer disruption to their identity building due to the uncertainty of transit period in Indonesia. Meanwhile, young people of the host communities also face challenges of their changing neighborhoods with the arrival of refugees and they may view the refugees as a threat to their society.

The social integration of refugees, specifically young refugees, is understudied. This study explores the social integration, which include interaction, communication, acceptance, acknowledgement, and cooperation issues, between young refugees and young people in the host communities in Indonesia. We view this research as an opportunity to develop a new shared identity between the youth in refugees and host communities. Both communities are currently exposed by foreign cultures that causes minimum interaction and may leads to mutual incomprehension to each community's social condition. The disconnectedness can lead to disharmony that may escalate into resentment and conflict. Hence, positive interaction between the two youth communities is expected to develop a more tolerant and cohesive future community.

2. Objective

The research project aims to develop a method to support the reconstruction of shared identity between youth in refugees and host communities in Indonesia. By taking advantage of the common values as youth and diversity in both communities, the research is expected to contribute to the formation of new values in the future. It intends to explore the following research questions:

- What are the common values that serve as foundation to build a shared identity?
- How to support young people in both communities to project themselves as a responsible citizen of the world with a vision of peaceful co-existence?
- How have the perception and attitudes of young people of the two communities change after being exposed with opportunities provided by the research project?

3. Target Group of People

The research will target selected youth from refugees and host communities as Research Subjects (RS). The research will be located in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Makassar is by far the third largest host after Jakarta and Medan, that hosts 2,041 refugees/asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2016). In Makassar, majority of refugees live in shelters or “community-housing” managed by International Organization for Migration (IOM). Those shelters/community housing will be the entry point of outreach to the refugees and host communities. One refugee cluster will be selected based on: (1) availability and the number of eligible adolescents in both refugee cluster and surrounding host communities, (2) access by respected authorities of the communities, and (3) distance between refugee cluster and the host communities’ settlements.

4. Project Description

The research project will observe perception, attitude, and interaction between the youth of refugee/asylum seeker towards the youth of host communities and vice versa. For that purpose, an **action research** approach is used, by involving selected youth from both communities as the research subjects (RS). As an action research, the central purpose is change – it uses flexible design based on self-reflection throughout the process to improve the practice. The research subjects, who act both as as research participants and as research partners, will work together on an action research that leads to the design a Creative Placemaking Project (CPP) in their neighborhood.

Throughout the research, the RS and the surrounding communities are expected to learn from the experience of the co-existence and co-living between the refugees with host communities. Instead of highlighting differences leading to potential new conflicts between refugees and host communities, this action research celebrates common values, builds connection to the place they live in, as well as

builds shared identity amongst both communities. The common values, connectedness, shared identity and the changes made by the research subject for their communities are the main component that is targeted throughout this action research. Hence, we expect the research to influence ways of thinking of the youth in both communities and contribute to the exploration of new values that lead to a more diverse and tolerant society in the future.

4.1. Research methodology

We will begin with an initial visit on the communities to observe first-hand the social integration challenges faced by the refugees and host communities in Makassar, Indonesia. Learning from the visit will influence the research design in the next stages, including in identifying RS. As the research progresses, we will employ several methods considered as best suited for each step as described below. The change in perception and attitudes of the RS as a result of their engagement in this action research will be measured through a baseline study and an endline study.

Step 1. Exploring identity through culture and heritage

- The first step in developing awareness is to understand where one stands. In this step, RS are expected to identify important values in their lives by exploring their culture and heritage through interaction with older, respective figures in their own communities. For this purpose, a modified method will be introduced to and used by RS. The process is expected to encourage RS to think deeply about what they considered as important values for themselves, which are the basis for developing a tolerant mindset.
- A workshop will be organized to allow different groups to share and discuss their findings. This will allow exchange of information, including on similarities and differences between host and refugee communities, and how various aspects contribute to our personal identity building.
- A community presentation will be organized to share findings to wider communities, both host and refugee communities. This is aimed to share knowledge and participants' learning, which is expected to encourage discussion on personal and group identity building, bridge communication and generational gaps, and build a more inclusive culture among different groups.

Step 2. Exploring places of importance

- The next step involves exploration of meaning of places by the RS. Previous research (e.g. Twigger-ross & Uzzell, 1996; Kebede, 2010; Denov & Akesson, 2013) showed that places hold specific meaning in our lives and to some extent contribute to our personal identity building. A workshop on place and identity will be organized to engage RS in discussion related to

placemaking. The workshop aims to prepare the RS to design placemaking projects, while at the same time cultivate lessons-learned throughout the process. Placemaking is about the deliberate shaping of an environment to facilitate social interaction and improve a community's quality of life (MIT DUSP, 2013). Pre-identified topics include in-depth exploration on purpose (rethinking the meaning of home, family, friends, etc), community and environmental awareness, the role of values in placemaking, and the placemaking activities itself.

- Following the workshop, RS are expected to identify places of importance in their current lives, using a pre-designed urban walking method. Participants will walk around their neighborhood in groups to identify landmarks, places, or spots that they consider as familiar, important, or hold meanings to them, personally or as a group. A specific theme for place mapping may be agreed beforehand by the participants to allow more focused discussion later. Attention will be given to verbal and non-verbal interactions of strangers as they walk and to the significance of the practical accomplishment of walking together (Middleton, 2016).
- Another workshop will be organized to allow different groups to share and discuss their findings. The workshop will focus on participants' accounts of their walking experiences and how it contributes to their understanding of relation between places and identity.

Step 3. Creative Placemaking design and action planning

In this step, RS will design Creative Placemaking Projects (CPP), as a way to spark positive interaction between the two communities. The CPP is aimed to create or reshape their shared living space for a more tolerant and cohesive community. We expect that RS will take into consideration the physical, cultural and social identities of the space that is formed by the presence of both refugees and host communities and aim to maximize the shared values and the potential of the place. The ideas of the placemaking project will arise from the RS themselves. Researchers' role is to guide participants throughout the process and facilitate discussion among different and mixed groups.