



Urban inter-referencing within and beyond a decentralized Indonesia



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ABSTRACT

An analytical emphasis upon the trans-Atlantic mobility of neoliberal urban policies has existed to date in much of the contemporary literature. This emphasis is gradually being redressed in work which highlights the urban inter-referencing that now exists elsewhere in the world and notably among Asian cities. In this paper we seek to advance this latter agenda when highlighting the potential for the progressive character of urban inter-referencing in the global south, its orchestration by local governments and their associations and the role of political leaders as illustrated in patterns and processes of urban inter-referencing among Indonesian cities and districts in the era of decentralization. Indonesia represents a vast and diverse laboratory in and of itself but there is also some evidence of urban inter-referencing extending to cities elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

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Introduction

The past decade has seen a burgeoning of research within geography to join pre-existing strands across political science, international relations and the history of municipal government and planning on the subject of patterns and processes of urban policy mobility. Curiously, much of this current interest in urban policy mobilities found in the geography literature remains quite narrow in its purview. It has concentrated to a large extent on elaborating instances of the neoliberalisation of policy and retains a strong geographical focus on the (north) Atlantic and, to a lesser extent, the wider Anglophone world as the origin point and the primary axis of policy mobility. There are signs in recent work of an expansion in the horizons of this geographical research not least as a result of a re-engagement with a pre-existing strands of writing in planning and municipal histories (Harris & Moore, 2013) and in this paper we also seek to break the bounds of what might be regarded as the 'Anglosphere' (Legrand, 2012) when exploring the potential for the mobility of apparently progressive urban policies within the global south. Here we take up the challenge of trying to understand the 'worldliness' of the many ordinary cities beyond a rostrum of world cities defined in terms of stocks and flows of financial and producer service activity (Robinson, 2006), and, specifically, the increasing inter-referencing among cities of the global

south with regard to all matters urban (Ong, 2011; Roy, 2009, 2011). While there is little doubting the vigor of contemporary neoliberal urban policy mobility across the north Atlantic, it is worth remembering that, in contrast to the present day, the historic high-point of north Atlantic-centred policy mobility in the late 1880s to early 1900s was on balance progressive in character (Clarke, 2012; Rodgers, 1998; Saunier, 2001, 2002; Ward, 2002). It is in regard of this *history*, not the contemporary period of neoliberal policy mobility, that the Atlantic-focused literature may be an important analytical foil when considering urban policy mobilities in the global south today. Such an historical perspective is vital if the contemporary urban policy mobilities literature is not to 'replicate and reify the heady whirl of "fast policies"' (Harris & Moore, 2013: 1504) associated with neoliberalism. Although neoliberalism has been argued to be a mutating hegemonic discourse which makes it difficult to define precisely (Peck & Tickell, 2002), its main aspects were summarized in terms of a 'Washington consensus' (Williamson, 1993) and might be regarded as contributing to the mobility of urban policies associated with reinstating market mechanisms into, and asserting efficiency in the use of resources centred on, government bureaucracies. The aims of progressive urban policy might be considered to stand in some contrast to those of neoliberalism in that they place an emphasis on producing greater social equity.

As many as 70% of the world's cities participate in some form of transnational municipal networking (UCLG, 2010 cited in Bontenbal & van Lindert, 2011: 447) and the enormous appetite for policy

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exchange implied in such a figure is in no small measure a product of a deficit of local government capacity and trends towards governmental decentralization that are quite widespread across countries of the global south. Indonesia is a prime case in point. In this paper we consider the available evidence regarding the inter-referencing of urban policy across this vast archipelago of a nation-state which has been undergoing perhaps the world's largest experiment in governmental decentralization. The diplomacy of national governments, the aid of donor agencies and technical assistance of NGOs have long represented important *external* influences on national and local policy making in Indonesia. However, the country has also been the subject of intense policy development, experimentation and copying as a result of far-reaching decentralization of powers and capacities following radical legislation in 1999 onwards after the fall of the highly centralized Suharto regime (Miller, 2013). Indonesia presents a large and diverse 'laboratory' or internal 'market' for experimentation in terms of policy formulation and inter-referencing among local governments. In the next section of the paper we situate an understanding of the processes and content of urban inter-referencing in Indonesia in their broader context of the potential distinctiveness of urban inter-referencing across the global south. In the subsequent section we discuss some of the methodological challenges to scholarly analysis of policy mobility and some of the limits of the evidence we have been able to gather on policy development and exchange in Indonesia. We then explore evidence of instances of distinctive local urban policy development and their travels *within* Indonesia, before focusing upon a single prominent case study of policy development and exchange centred on the city of Solo (also known as Surakarta) in Central Java. In conclusion, we highlight the ambiguous content of urban inter-referencing in Indonesia – seemingly open to interpretation as part progressive, part neoliberal in character, seemingly at times shallow and at others having some policy rather than purely symbolic substance. The Solo case highlights the need for future studies to take seriously political leadership as the embodiment of patterns and processes of policy mobility. It also affords just a glimpse of the wider projection of urban policies beyond Indonesia.

A world of urban inter-referencing: beyond neoliberal and north Atlantic bounds

Over little more than a decade the academic interest in various aspects of the potential mobility of urban policies has soared. This literature is to be found in the disciplines of political science, planning and international relations but also in geography. Terms such as policy mobility (McCann, 2011; Peck, 2012; Ward, 2006), policy exchange (Rodgers, 1998), and urban inter-referencing (Ong, 2011) among others have proliferated in a world where the jurisdictional origins of any given policy are almost impossible to identify definitively. The terms policy mobility and exchange tend to imply that a policy or elements of a policy seemingly developed in one territorial jurisdiction may find expression in another jurisdiction in-tact, although the literature associated with the term also speaks strongly to the adaptation and mutation of policies in motion. In this paper we adopt the term urban inter-referencing for three reasons. First, it is the least demanding regarding the policy content of apparent connections between urban territories and their governments. In particular, without being overly laden with any meaning regarding the substantive content of policies in motion, and including issues of citation, allusion, aspiration, comparison, and competition, it highlights the importance of the symbolic contents of the urban that may be mobile. Second, it is also a term that is perhaps the least laden with a sense of origin points or antecedents of particular policies. Third, as we describe below, it is a

term that to some extent has been associated most closely with relations among towns and cities across Asia (for example, Ong & Roy, 2011).

The terms urban inter-referencing and urban policy mobility carry with them a perspective which draws attention to the way in which policy development (and adaptation and mutation) is less the product of, and for, a given territorial jurisdiction than an assemblage produced from networks of relations into which governments and their territories are woven. There is an associated danger when using such terms of emphasizing this topological perspective to the exclusion of the continuing role of the territoriality of government which we wish to avoid in this paper. It is important to retain an emphasis upon the real differences that exist in terms of territorially circumscribed resources (including those of government) across the global south – a feature that cannot be overlooked when seeking to understand the likely substance of urban inter-referencing there.

Urban policy mobility and inter-referencing: the limits of current preoccupations

For its part, a very recent interest with policy mobility found in the geography literature could be regarded as having broadened an understanding of the nature of power exerted in patterns and processes of urban policy mobility. This work (for example, Peck, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Ward, 2006) can be summarized as having a desire to move beyond literature on policy transfer and learning (Peck & Theodore, 2010), the narrowest of which was founded upon presumptions of rational choice among policy 'consumer-emulators' and assumed that 'good policies drive out bad'. However, it is also apparent that such a critique of existing research runs the risk of caricaturing a body of research which has matured significantly (Marsh & Evans, 2012) and remains centred on the politics of policy exchange. Moreover, a strength of political science and international relations perspectives is that they highlight a number of different mechanisms – modelling, reciprocity, coercion, learning, etc. – through which policy and regulatory activity become internationalized (Braithwaite & Drahos, 2000) and re-shaped to local circumstances (Acharya, 2004).

There has also been more than a suggestion of 'presentism' (McFarlane, 2011) pervading much of this geographical research. A highly attractive and popular research agenda has emerged around: the manner in which the mobility of policy is embodied in and associated with a parallel mobility of key individuals and strata of workforces (Larner & Laurie, 2010); the speed of 'fast' policy transfer (Peck & Tickell, 2002) and its connection to new mediums of ICT-based communication, dissemination, monitoring and global 'scanning' (Temenos & McCann, 2012); and the near continuous mutation of policies that are never simply exported wholesale (e.g. González, 2010; Peck, 2011). Perhaps as a result of the empirical complexities revealed in such a research agenda, the geography literature has also addressed the methodological difficulties of adequately tracing 'policies in motion' (Peck & Theodore, 2010) and the need to deploy topological rather than territorially-rooted perspectives.

For all its strengths, this literature nevertheless has remained quite narrowly focused on patterns and processes of neoliberal urban policy mobility across the Atlantic in particular but also the broader Anglophone world. The former emphasis seems appropriate given the hegemony of neoliberal policy reforms taking place internationally over recent decades. In this respect this new work also informs studies pertaining to the global south, including Indonesia where the landscape of decentralized governance reflects wider national and international trends towards the neoliberalization of policy impinging upon the urban. The conjunction in less than a decade of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the post-Suharto

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