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City Development Strategies: Making Urban Investment Work Design-based planning internship with Solo Kota Kita (Our City Solo) Solo, Indonesia

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Introduction

Solo Kota Kita and Solo, Indonesia

Solo Kota Kita is a non-profit design and planning organization that focuses on participatory planning projects and international development work. Their recent projects have involved community-based design and dissemination of neighborhood data that is used in local planning processes. SKK is based out of Solo, Indonesia, a medium-sized city in central Java and New York City. Solo is currently undergoing burgeoning growth and developing its identity as a domestic cultural tourism destination in Java and Indonesia at a larger scale. The city has been successful in its recent growth due to both national and local trends. Nationally, Indonesia is undergoing a growth period due to exploitation of national resources, industrialization and urbanization. Locally, Solo is benefiting from strong leadership, a centralized geographic position and symbolic importance as a cultural hub for Java, Indonesia's most populous island. The city is at a crucial development point where it has the potential to grow sustainably and improve quality of life for its citizens.

UN HABITAT City Development Strategies program

Solo Kota Kita has been commissioned by UN Habitat to develop sets of advocacy tools for leaders in three Indonesian cities. These toolkits will support municipal leaders towards increased effectiveness in liaisons with national level planning departments and international development organizations. This project is part of UN HABITAT's City Development Strategies (CDS) initiative, which seeks to support medium-sized cities that are already at a critical growth moment with tools to push that momentum towards self-sustaining growth conditions. This program is innovative in its choice of scale. International development planning projects frequently address issues in mega-cities and rural areas, however, middle-sized cities make up the living conditions for many. Solutions for middle-sized cities may also be more easily replicable, compounding the effectiveness of a development strategy. The CDS program also stands out in its type of engagement with municipalities. UN HABITAT does not seek to replicate planning work but rather supports local governance with advocacy tools to leverage support from higher scales of development. The cities selected for the CDS program have already proven successful at local development projects. The CDS profiles and workshops will increase municipal leaders' capacity to galvanize support nationally and internationally.

CDS internship goals

The project goals for the summer internship were to support SKK in the development of the CDS toolkits for the three cities: Solo, Banjarmasin and Pekalongan. The CDS toolkits include a city profile that outlines each city's development vision and key upcoming projects—what the

city is doing well and opportunities for new planning work. The city vision is supplemented by spatial analysis, mapping and stakeholder analysis that either validates or presents opportunities for new strategic focuses. The profiles also outline a sequence of development projects that the city has successfully completed and upcoming pipeline projects. The development project descriptions operate as a portfolio of options for national and international level investment. In addition to the profile development, the CDS project scope includes a sequence of stakeholder workshops about key development projects. The goal of these workshops is twofold: (1) to engage local stakeholders in the city's development vision and near-future projects and (2) to gain input from stakeholders on key issues and benefits from prioritized pipeline projects. Our internship work included completion of the profile and workshops for Solo as well as site visits and research that will feed into the subsequent two toolkits for Banjarmasin and Pekalongan.

Project summary

The summer internship work for the City Development Strategies profiles was both a large undertaking requiring intensely focused work and a highly successful project. We completed a huge amount of work during the 8 weeks in Indonesia and two weeks of preparatory and post work in New York City. The SKK team produced a final profile of Solo, two successful stakeholder workshops, extensive research and site visits for the second and third cities and established strong relationships between SKK and local leaders in all three cities. While we were able to accomplish all of the internship goals, it was not without challenges, new learnings and innovative thinking.

The two biggest challenges in the internship for the team as a whole involved the quick turn-arounds between research trips and the first workshop. We had a tight schedule, which was necessary to accomplish the many deliverables we had outlined for the summer. Transferring from observation and analysis to development of the materials and relationships for the public presentation occurred in a hairpin turn in the timeline. While this was tough, the adaptability and commitment of the SKK team, along with the informal flex in "Indonesian time", allowed us to pull everything together on-time and with flying colors. The first workshop, focused on Pasar Gede, was in many ways the more successful of the two. I believe that the intense preparation that we all participated in before that workshop ended up focusing and energizing the team.

The second tough challenge came only hours after the Pasar Gede workshop. Later that same day, we met with Bruno, the UN HABITAT officer directing the CDS program. He flew into Solo from Fukuoka, Japan to visit SKK for the workshop and to review our progress on the first profile. The feedback from Bruno was constructively critical and taught us much about the goals of CDS and the dynamics of multi-scalar international development. It also required us to almost completely restructure the Solo profile—a sizeable undertaking for the final two weeks of the in-country internship time. This revision meeting presented an A-Ha moment for my time in Indonesia. Bruno's edits and explanations about the purpose of the profiles elucidated for me the role of CDS as a sort of meta-planning. While the local municipalities are able to create progressive development projects, they are not equipped with a highly sophisticated language for urbanism. The spatial analysis we contributed added analytic complexity to the existing masterplans. Our profiles also presented concise executive-level proposals for new projects. While planning analysis seeks to go deep into urban issues, findings may be more effective if presented as clearly and directly as possible. Our profiles will operate as investment portfolios for high-level leadership. After the meeting with Bruno, again due to the team's

commitment and flexibility, we were able to gear up and regenerate the report to fit the needs of the program goals.

One of the many incredible aspects of the summer internship was the team itself. The variety of skillsets involved, backgrounds and personalities made our work easy at times, convoluted at others but as a whole a collaboration that was greater than the sum of its parts. Because we had several phases of our work with multiple types of abilities needed, all team members shone and led at different points. I was very lucky to work closely with Rifai Ahmad. As the Solo-based project leader, Rifai knows the insides and outs of local politics and has a knack for creating trust with stakeholders. During site visits in all three of the cities, Rifai would almost immediately be sitting on a local resident's porch sharing tea and chatting about their personal histories with the neighborhood, or a similar scenario. In addition to observing his personable engagement, I learned more about Indonesian planning by collaborating with him on the city vision section of the profile than I could have through general interviews or academic research. Through his sophisticated and at times cynical though never discouraging perspective on local development, I gained an insiders view on local planning.

Community impact

The internship work had community impacts at multiple scales. First, at the largest scale, the CDS profiles will help garner increased investment for the cities' pipeline development projects from the national level and international organizations. From our discussions with Bruno, it seems that this investment is almost ready to go. The project will be able to improve the livability of these cities at the urban scale from effects of the pipeline development projects. At the governance level, our meetings with local officials and collaboration on presentations for the workshops have increased local leaders' capacities to discuss the city's vision and the impacts of project typologies. We already received very positive feedback from the planning officials we worked with. At the stakeholder level, our workshops were able to both provide an opportunity for input from stakeholders and to provide them with an understanding of the city's vision—a higher level view of why projects are chosen and how they contribute to the city's development overall. Lastly, at the smallest scale, the collaboration within our team will leave a positive impact. All of the SKK team members are leaders in their communities, from street vendors to architecture students to neighborhood associations. Our mutual learnings together have increased everyone's skillsets and understanding of urban planning dynamics in the three cities and in general. In addition to the multiple scales of impact, our work this summer will reverberate over time. There have been some immediate benefits from the workshops and direct collaborations but there will be impacts that will arise as the CDS program continues into its future phases, from new project development to SKK and local leaders' increased capacity to further develop CDS toolkits.