

secession

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WELLEN?
Freiheit

ruangrupa: Lumbung

Lumbung, directly translatable as “rice barn”, is a collective pot or accumulation system, where crops produced by a community is stored as a future shared common resource

Analogous with the 0.1% narrative that was responsible for the Occupy Movement, we can consider the global contemporary art world as a business scape or an economical terrain. Who gains the most from the current global practice of contemporary art? Can we strive for a more just distribution model, in which asymmetrical dependency rooted in unfair power relations and demoralization is not being reproduced?

Also analogous with capitalism that can absorb and turn anything into commodity, contemporary art nowadays could also swallow and churn anything out into its product. Worse than capitalism, art nowadays is still hegemonic, extractive and exploitative.

This is our attempt to break this cycle, so contemporary art could be useful for more, especially those who contribute to it. We are trying to answer this condition by making an attempt to imagine, develop and practice a new model of contemporary art economy.

The understanding of the term resource could be shed anew. The use of funds, spaces (both physical and mental), time, social capitals, existing networks, and different forms of knowledge will not only be questioned, but also be operated in the real world directly to push equal resource distribution in our ecosystem.

The global dependency of artistic cultural institutions towards the funding system—especially foreign fundings in contexts where nation-states are largely absent or threatened—creates a constant danger against the sustainability and existence of these institutions. Curiously, most if not all of these international funding institutions were established or coming from ex-colonizer countries, not coincidentally still the ones in control for the majority of the global resources until today. This condition has created a demoralizing state, where weakening process against the bargaining power of artistic cultural institutions are continuously eroded. It is not an exaggeration to consider the power relations

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reproduced through the funders-grantee relationship were designed to extend imperialism—where power relations are asymmetrical and extraction-accumulation logics underline our contemporary practices. It renders everything we do sinful—breeding envy, gluttony, avarice, lust, pride, sloth and wrath in our relations with resources.

Nevertheless, mere criticism towards hand-out funding systems as new reproductions of age-old imperialism are tired. Answers for this so far has been hiding these imperialistic power relations deeper. We just get better at pushing more things under deeper rugs. Nation-state, as a system to gain the promised sovereignty, on the other hand, is clearly losing its grip, worldwide. For a long time already, we have decided to fight for our independence from either foreign funding or state sponsorship in our practice.

In a time where real politics, practiced through conventional nation-state system, is doubtful, we deem a deeper understanding of scale is vital—both in time and agency. Deeper time, which turns climate to weather, could as well means turns intervention to practice. Institutional critique into institutional building. Deeper agency, on the other hand, brings different understanding of processes. What could only be limited to representation before, could now be expanded to occupation. The hierarchy of local-national-regional-global could therefore be horizontalized, with permanent negotiation between the scales, not one being subservient to the other.

Learning from the accumulation of ruangrupa's collective experiences in directly practicing institutional building as an artistic form, we proposed a collaboration in imagining, tinkering, experimenting and executing models of *koperasi* (closely but not exactly translatable to cooperative), a model of economy based on democratic principles of *rapat* (assembly), *mufakat* (agreement), *gotong royong* (commons), *hak mengadakan protes bersama* (right to stage collective protest) and *hak menyingkirkan diri dari kekuasaan absolut* (right to abolish absolute power). *Lumbung* as a model of resource governance will serve as the center point of this practice.

Lumbung as a mechanism—something we have been and continuously experimenting with in our own ecosystem— is a metaphorical space to store our common resources. It will be the main driving force and act as a base for this collaboration to understand resources as both tangible (money, time, space and equipment, for example) and intangible (program, knowledge, archive, et cetera) materials.

From 2015-18, ruangrupa co-developed a cultural platform Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem together with several artists' collectives in Jakarta, located at Gudang Sarinah warehouse, Pancoran, South Jakarta. It is a cross-disciplinary space that aims to maintain, cultivate and establish an integrated support system for creative talents, diverse communities, and various initiatives. It also aspires to be able to make connections and collaborate, to share knowledge and ideas, as well as to encourage critical thinking, creativity, and innovations. In 2018, learning from the experience establishing Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem and together with Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara, ruangrupa co-initiated GUDSKUL: contemporary art collective and ecosystem studies. It is a public learning space established to practice an expanded understanding of collective values, such as equality, sharing, solidarity, friendship and togetherness.

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Lumbung is a collective resource pot, operating under the logics of commons, is an agglomeration of ideas, stories, (wo)manpower, time and other shareable resources. Metaphorically, this is a modest living room so citizens could come and build it from the ground up, therefore owning the space themselves. It should be able to be a new space, formed by the intersections of elements, without absorbing (therefore eliminating) them. It is an exploration space for innovations, without institutional formal restrictions. Interdisciplinarity is key here. It is where art meets activism, management and networking, gathering supports, reading environments and identifying local resources. These created actions and spaces intertwine social relations and transactions. They slowly grow and in the end find its public nature in society. This is a strategy “to live in and with society”. It imagines the relations an art institution has in its society: being an active constituent of it. Strategies are then developed based on proximity and common pleasure. Is this model scalable?

Lumbung, on the other hand, is a commoning model for sharing resources—economical to start with, but could continuously expanding to non-monetary resources, such as ideas, knowledge, programs, innovations, time and space. In this understanding, we are challenging the notion of commodity. We are essentially looking for strategies that transform production funds to sustain in deeper understanding of time and impact. Could social relations be made through reproductions and non-commodity transactions?

Towards an expanded notion of EKOSISTEM

1. EKOSISTEM

After existing as an artistic collective for nearly 20 years, ruangrupa (founded in 2000), has been experimenting with the notion of Ekosistem in these last few years. Together with other Jakarta-based initiatives, notably Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara (although several others had come, stayed, and sometime also left, throughout the years), the term Ekosistem were first used to refer to the expansion of multiple collectivities in Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem (GSE). As a label, GSE was coined in 2016, to label this “collective of collectives” relocation to the complex of large complex consisting of three 3000 sq.m warehouses, of which GSE occupied two. To put two and two together: gudang means warehouse in Indonesian, while Sarinah refers to the name of the state-owned retail company owner of the complex. History has it, Sarinah was given by Soekarno, the first president of Indonesia, as an homage to his caretaker as a child.

Arts Collaboratory, founded in 2007 as a global network of 25 art organisations, of which ruangrupa is a part of, contributed significantly to this understanding of an artistic ecosystem. It refers to an ideal condition where organisations, initiatives and collectives organically form an environment where trust, mutual respect and self-care act as the foundations for co-existence. It goes beyond the importance of individuals working together (the basis for collectivity) and insists on the vitality of multiplicities to operate and make use of each other’s positions, strengths and weaknesses altogether. Realising that we are already in this together, we commit and invest in each other, no longer in mere transactional project-per-project basis, but for the long term.

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To put it in a straightforward way: ecosystem building is the next natural step for collectivism.

2. EDUCATION

In 2018, after experimenting for two years with different models of co-existence as an ecosystem through GSE, the Ekosistem decided to do its last relocation to a property it managed to acquire together (abolishing the need to rent in an increasingly unaffordable context of a city like Jakarta). This final move also indicated another major shift in the Ekosistem's overall practice: education.

While both Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara (consisting mainly of graduates from the pedagogical Universitas Negeri Jakarta, therefore trained to be art teachers in public schools) had been naturally putting education in the center of their artistic practices, for ruangrupa the word education itself held slightly a different meaning. Only after initiating several educational projects, such as the annual curatorial and writing workshops and the attempt to build a short-lived educational wing, called Institut ruangrupa (Ir.)—culminated in the form of a three-month long informal school called RURU Gakko as ruangrupa's contribution to Aichi Triennale 2016 in Nagoya, we gradually realised that the collective itself is indeed an educational platform from which each of its own members respectively build their particular ways of knowledge production and processes.

Realising the long-term commitment it requires from each member to render collectivism's educational potential into reality, we ask ourselves whether it was possible to see ruangrupa as a resource of knowledge that could be shared beyond our direct surrounding. Using this framing, less temporal investments from those who are interested in learning about and being a part of the Ekosistem would render ourselves more inclusive as well as accessible to a larger public. Long internal discussions followed and the Ekosistem finally decided to initiate Gudskul: contemporary art collective and ecosystem studies as a result.

Gudskul is a learning platform that any part of the Ekosistem could utilise to push ideas further. Now, virtually anyone in the Ekosistem could take the metaphorical remote control and use it in any form of knowledge production and dissemination.

Through the establishment of Gudskul, we are testing two interests: (1) concentrating forces in order to decentralise even more, plus (2) self-institutionalisation to better question the hierarchy of power. Let time does its work and proves whether these are seeds able to bear fruitful results or that otherwise would be the case.

3. ECONOMY

Another element we are putting our collective energy into, indicated by the use of term ekosistem itself, is sustainability—not only in an ecological term, but further also in its cultural economical understanding.

In Indonesian agricultural tradition, lumbung is understood as a common space to store harvest surplus, to prepare against the time when resources are scarce. From spatial design point of view, they are

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situated in the center of a village and built according to a specific architectural typology: single building on stilts, with storage space in the upper deck, while the ground level is used for public gatherings, religious ceremonies and other common events. Stylistically, every region in the archipelago has also developed its own vernacular expression recognisable as lumbung.

Understanding the richness of lumbung as a metaphor, since GSE was established and further in Gudskul, the Ekosistem has introduced this concept for its economical model and management. Through lumbung, each collective assesses itself as a resource not only for itself, but also for the others in the Ekosistem. These resources include, but not limited to, money, time, man-power, equipments, space, program, practice and knowledge. These resources are then aggregated together to form a collective pot. This pot then conceptually is a collection of common resources ready to use by everyone in the Ekosistem. The bigger the Ekosistem is, the more friends it has, the bigger, richer and more diverse the lumbung would be. This collectively managed common lumbung is the essence of the Ekosistem's sustainability.

Koperasi, understood globally as a co-op economical model and also holds the double meaning as "working together" in Bahasa Indonesia, is something Gudskul Ekosistem extremely interested in building as a practice. Basically, this model contributes ownerships, power and decision making to the hands of a system's own users. If the Ekosistem is run with a lumbung as its lifeline, then koperasi puts further the control and ownerships of this collective pot in the hands of everyone using it as a resource. Collectivity is guaranteed through this system. More contributions made into the lumbung, the more well-off everyone in the koperasi is, and vice versa, when resources are scarce, the fact is felt by everyone in the Ekosistem.

If lumbung is a concept, then koperasi acts as its organic implementation.

From these understandings, derived from the sensibilities we have built (and are continue building) as an artists' collective so far, we are proposing an institutional turn of partner institutions. It is a one-to-one direct engagement with the consequence of thinking as a resource, as well as a product of certain ideology which in turns produce its own bureaucracy.

We are planning to operate directly within a global network of institutions and initiatives in various geographical locations, for each of these institutions and initiatives to achieve independence and sustainability.

ruangrupa

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