

# **Peacebuilding at the Frontier of Democratization: Urban Planning as a Vehicle for Conflict Resolution in Indonesia**

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**Relevance of Project to the Center for Citizen Peacebuilding:** This longitudinal, ethnographic study examines how citizen participation takes shape and may alleviate divisions among urban dwellers in newly democratic states. Specifically, my dissertation research will examine how new opportunities for citizen participation and public dialogue about issues of community concern in Indonesia are addressing longstanding, sometimes violent conflicts over environmental management and social exclusion in Batam, Indonesia.\* The project is thus consistent with the Center for Citizen Peacebuilding's focus on research and education regarding citizens' contributions to constructive public dialogue and the resolution of conflicts.

## **Research Questions and Contributions**

Urban planning is a central locus for individual-government interaction and the formulation of political rights. This study examines how democratic transition is "changing the rules" for citizens and city planners living in a special development area that the Indonesian national government had previously governed in a technocratic, highly centralized mode. The island and city of Batam, Indonesia is a geographic and political frontier. Batam has been the Indonesian region with the fastest population and economic growth over the last 40 years. It is currently grappling with Indonesian initiatives to devolve urban management through one of the world's foremost experiments in government decentralization. This triggers questions about how planning enables and constrains a sense of local place, local community, and local rights and norms for citizen participation. How does democracy change citizens' and government officials' practices and levels of influence? How and under what circumstances may policies, governance structures, and local communities effect democratic governance of cities?

Located within sight of the global city of Singapore, Batam has sought to emulate Singapore's investment, workforce, and landscape. Despite dreams of creating a high-tech, middle class city, however, Batam is known for many vacant buildings, unskilled labor, prostitution, and human trafficking. Since the 1998 fall of the authoritarian New Order government, it has also become a frontier in the negotiation of democracy and regional autonomy. A body politic of 900,000 migrants has a newfound sense of entitlement to public services and democratic participation. At the same time, Indonesia is undertaking one of the world's most radical government decentralization programs. Urban planning is at the leading edge of decentralization and democratization initiatives to bring local decisions to local communities, and Batam exemplifies its complexities. The Batam Industrial Development Authority (BIDA), based hundreds of miles away in Jakarta, had held exclusive authority to develop Batam until the 1999 creation of a city government and local parliament. In the absence of laws clarifying their roles, they are engaged in an intense power struggle. Citizens and the media, having found their voice, are at the forefront not only in debating issues of public concern but also in setting the new structures and expectations for citizen participation in public policy,

The premise of this dissertation research is that conflict management in Batam is shifting from a framework of state domination to one of democratic engagement in conflict resolution that takes citizens' interests and rights into account. In brief, I hypothesize that the ongoing

political democratization is producing more inclusive decision-making processes and planning that pays more attention to people's living environments. To examine how, I will focus on environmental management, the locus of acute friction over Batam's development. Thousands of squatters in watershed protection areas are mobilizing politically, and the attitudes of BIDA, the city, and parliament towards them is pivotal to each side's legitimacy. Environmental management also points up tensions over capacity, style, and priorities among the different Indonesian agencies.

### **Research Plan**

This work builds upon a foundation of consistent professional work and scholarly research on Indonesian environmental management and urban planning since 1989. Having lived in Indonesia over three extended periods, I am highly proficient in spoken and written Indonesian and familiar with the culture, living conditions, and institutions. I am particularly familiar with Batam, having lived there for 15 months in 1996 through 1997 while serving as the project manager for BIDA's Environmental Master Plan for the region. In August 2006, I visited Batam to renew contacts with BIDA and refine my research plan. BIDA welcomes me to conduct this research and has provided a letter of invitation. \*

I will study these transformations through 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Batam beginning in January 2008.\* Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and media content analysis in Batam will form the core of my research. At BIDA's request, I will be working within their agency to help revive their environmental protection programs. This will allow me to discern priorities and decision-making within BIDA, the city, and parliament by participating in meetings and conducting 40 semi-structured interviews. At the same time, I will be actively seeking opportunities to volunteer with emerging community-based advocacy and social service organizations so that I can understand how they are creating new structures and expectations for citizen participation within the new democratic framework. Through ongoing interaction, I will collect data through participant observation and at least 40 interviews with citizen activists. I will also gather information through following local news media and strengthening my existing relationships with local journalists.

Returning to the US in the fall of 2008, I will be completing my data analysis and writing up my dissertation during the 2008-09 academic year. It will also prepare one article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal and another for a more professionally oriented publication during that period so that I can share my results and engage with a broader audience of scholars and practitioners working on citizen peacebuilding action and research. Few have conducted ethnographic research within Indonesian government institutions, and none since democratization, so the project offers unique knowledge about the inner workings of the state during this important political transition. Through engagement with Indonesian policymakers and scholars, I will contribute practical recommendations to improve the decentralization effort.