The politics of learning from a small city: Solo as translocal model and political launch pad

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The politics of learning from a small city: Solo as translocal model and political launch pad

Tim Bunnell[a], Rita Padawangi[b] and Eric C. Thompson[c]

ABSTRACT
Joko Widodo ('Jokowi'), mayor of the small Indonesian city of Solo (also officially known as Surakarta) between 2005 and 2012, was subsequently elected as governor of Jakarta and then as president of the Republic of Indonesia. This paper examines aspects of Jokowi's political journey that speak to urban/regional studies debates on the politics of inter-municipal learning. It shows how the emergence of Solo as a 'best-practice city' in translocal learning networks enabled small-city civic boosterism and provided a launch pad for Jokowi's electability in Jakarta. Implications of translocal learning at the 'sending' end are thus shown to extend beyond matters of local political legitimacy.

KEYWORDS
Indonesia; small towns; urban learning; best practice; policy boosterism; extrospective municipal practices

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian city of Solo (also officially known as Surakarta) has recently featured in a range of social science work, including in regional and urban studies (Bunnell, Miller, Phelps, & Taylor, 2013; Fahmi, Prawira, Hudalah, & Firman, 2016; Morrell, Tuerah, & Sumarto, 2011; Phelps, Bunnell, Miller, & Taylor, 2014; Song, 2016; Taylor, 2015). This is unusual and noteworthy given both the size and geographical location of Solo. With a population of only around half a million people, Solo is one of the many relatively 'small cities' around the world that have conventionally been of little interest – and deemed to be of little significance – to international urban and regional studies audiences (Bell & Jayne, 2009). Solo is also located in one of the 'world areas' beyond Western Europe and North America which have largely appeared in the international literature through the trope of the 'Third World' megacity (Roy, 2009). In the context of Indonesia, that means specifically the national capital, Jakarta, and its extended urban region. The recent rise of interest in Solo centres upon the political personality of Joko Widodo ('Jokowi'), mayor of the city from 2005, who subsequently became governor of Jakarta (from October 2012), and then

president of the Republic of Indonesia (from October 2014). Jokowi's rise from 'small town' mayor (McRae, 2013) has understandably attracted the attention of political analysts (Winters, 2013). Some have noted the importance of Jokowi's track record in Solo to popular perceptions of his suitability for higher office(s) (Hamid, 2012). This paper focuses specifically on aspects of Jokowi's political trajectory that speak to urban and regional studies debates on the politics of interurban learning. It is shown how Jokowi sought to translate some of his mayoral accomplishments in Solo to Jakarta – the journey of his own political career thus facilitating transfer of knowledge from a small city to the national metropolitan centre. More significantly, it is argued that the prior emergence of Solo as a model city for aspects of urban development was a factor in Jokowi's upward political mobility to Jakarta. The anointing of some of Jokowi's policies and projects in Solo as national and international 'best practice' not only had conferred local legitimacy on his mayoral leadership but also had positioned him, as well as his home town, in more-than-local networks of visibility and possibility. Translocal learning from Solo, in other words, had important implications for that small city and its mayor, as well as in terms of wider political geographies.

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The main empirical section of the paper details different forms of learning from Solo in two other sub-national urban regions. First is the municipality of Pak Kret in Thailand which was paired with Solo as part of a European Union-funded programme to share good practices in local governance in Southeast Asia. In addition to detailing the local politics of policy adoption and learning at the Pak Kret end of this inter-municipal programme, it is shown how Solo's designation as a 'best practice city' for Pak Kret facilitated the promotion of both Solo and Jokowi in national and international networks. The second, and very different, site of learning concerns Jokowi's efforts to apply knowledge and experience from Solo to Jakarta. Two of Jokowi's most high-profile projects as governor of the national capital region drew upon his prior mayoral experiences and were legitimized in part in relation to narratives of 'success' in Solo. In addition, Jokowi's very electability as governor suggests a belief on the part of Jakarta's electorate that the(ir) city could benefit from his small town accomplishments – highly significant in a country where metropolitan Jakarta has long been imagined as the leading edge of national transformation.

The three-researcher collaboration for this paper emerges from a larger collaborative urban studies research project on Aspirations, Urban Governance and the Remaking of Asian Cities. That project involved a total of 11 scholars working across 16 sub-national urban regions in Asia, and encompassed varied attempts to understand the 'where' of aspirational urban futures – in a literal geographical sense as well as cultural systems of evaluation (Appadurai, 2013) – among both policy-makers and ordinary city dwellers. The starting point for the subset of research from the project that is presented here was the translocal travel of Solo as aspirational model for aspects of urban development elsewhere in Asia. This paper may thus be cast methodologically as a form of 'distended case study' (Peck & Theodore, 2012) encompassing Solo and two other sites (Pak Kret and Jakarta) where forms of learning from Solo took place. Importantly, however, efforts to follow Solo-as-model in this study also involved a spatial division of academic labour. Each collaborator was primarily responsible for research on one of the three sites, building upon their areal training or familiarity with the region concerned. The intention was to harness contextual expertise for authoritative site-based analyses, and to interweave these in order to generate relational/territorial insights (McCann & Ward, 2010) that would exceed the capacity of any individual collaborator. As such, this multi-sited study is aligned with Garth Myers' call for urbanists to foster 'collaborative energies that can build beyond the inevitable circumscription of the lone researcher' (Myers, 2014, p. 115).

The methods employed included key informant interviews, field-based observation and the collection of local documentary sources (in Bahasa Indonesia and Thai as well as in English). In each site, investigation centred upon uncovering the 'back story' (Jacobs, 2012, p. 419) of extant manifestations of translocal learning, as well as associated ongoing politics. In other words, efforts were made to uncover not merely the work that underlay prior learning, but also wider political effects and outcomes. The formal inter-municipal learning programme that Pak Kret was involved in made it possible to identify specific civil servants and academics as key informants. In Jakarta and Solo more reliance was placed on secondary material supplemented with interviews with key civil society actors, and local knowledge from prior field investigation. An important methodological commonality across the three sites, however, was iterative tracking between key informants, site observation (and associated ethnographic engagement) and local documentary sources. Non-site-specific secondary material, mainly from media and online institutional sources, were also collected. Before detailing the empirical evidence in the third and main section of the paper – charting the intertwined travels of Solo-as-model and of the city's former mayor – the second section positions the study in literatures on the politics of urban learning and its relational geographies.

THE POLITICS OF RELATIONAL URBAN LEARNING

Relational approaches to urban and regional transformation are well established and continue to flourish (Jacobs, 2012; Söderström, 2014), particularly in research on urban learning and policy mobilities. Important recent contributions to both of those overlapping strands of research have been distinguished from prior work by an explicit emphasis on politics and power. McFarlane (2011) has brought issues of ideology and power inequalities into a (re)conceptualization of learning that extends beyond earlier economic-oriented scholarship on innovation, research and development, and regional competitiveness. Proponents of urban policy mobilities research, meanwhile, distinguish their approach from longstanding 'policy transfer' scholarship in part through a concern with which policies are made mobile by whom, as well as how local interests contribute to the reshaping or 'mutation' of policies on the move (McCann, 2011; Peck, 2011).[1] Politics comes into play at both the receiving and sending ends of mobilized urban policies. At the receiving city end, local politics inflect decisions about which policies to adopt and the ways in which they are adapted or tailored (Zhang, 2012). At the other (sending) end, being seen as a model can confer prestige and political legitimacy upon associated policy-makers or elected city officials respectively. However, the sending end remains relatively neglected in urban policy mobilities research, with scholars seemingly more concerned to trace the global travels of well-known policy models than with hometown consumption of global policy success stories (McCann, 2013). There is also scope for further analysis of the more-than-local motivations for being seen as a model or good practice. For many (perhaps most) cities in the world, lacking the resources for global imaging or boosterism enjoyed by the likes of Barcelona, Manchester or Vancouver, being seen as worth learning from might be one of very few means of gaining extra-local municipal visibility. Involvement in translocal

'learning network formations' (McFarlane, 2011, p. 4) may, similarly, be one of a limited range of opportunities for expanding horizons of possibility for many cities and their leaders.

Work on the politics of both urban policy mobilities and city learning suggests that it is also important not to limit research to linear framings of 'sending' and 'receiving' ends. Eugene McCann, for example, has drawn attention to wider 'informational infrastructures' that variously 'interpret, frame, package and represent information about best policy practices, successful cities and cutting-edge ideas' (McCann, 2011, p. 114). While these may facilitate the inter-city movement of policy knowledge – some elements are set up precisely to organize and coordinate supposedly smooth transfers of knowledge – informational infrastructure implies much more than a dedicated channel of knowledge flow. The metaphor of 'connective tissue' which McCann also deploys, is perhaps more apt for capturing the often messy entanglements of routes and historical layers through which policies are assembled and made mobile. In a similar vein, McFarlane (2011, p. 118) points to 'how a mixture of space-times are assembled into a particular way of seeing an urban problem or solution'. McFarlane's influential conceptualization of 'urban learning assemblages' – comprising discourses, images, local cultural politics, specific actors and interventions, and wider forms of political consensus – serves to blur any straightforward categorization of 'importer' and 'exporter' cities (pp. 142–143). The issue of prevailing political consensus is also important in its own right in that it situates learning relations between any two (or more) cities in a much wider ideological terrain that variously mobilizes and marginalizes different forms of knowledge (Peck & Theodore, 2010). Cast in this critical light, municipal enrolment in translocal policy or learning networks may serve to skew policies and priorities in particular directions, and even to 'close down alternatives' (McFarlane, 2011, p. 135), as much as opening possibilities for city visibility or access to resources.

For all the attention that has recently been given to the politics of informational infrastructures and constitutive ideological contexts, it is equally important not to lose sight of the role of individual agents, specific groups of actors and institutions in mobilizing policies, knowledge and ideas (Temenos & McCann, 2013). Certain actors are particularly powerful in anointing, endorsing or simply selling policies and places associated with them as successful. Urban policy mobilities research has given most attention to slick 'globe-scanning' and sometimes globe-trotting consultants (McCann & Ward, 2010), but other potentially powerful actors include senior policy-makers and politicians who may deploy similar techniques of persuasion, such as through story-telling narratives, 'before-and-after' comparison, and forms of visual media (Rapoport, 2015). As such, there are clearly possibilities for work on policy mobilities and translocal learning to take seriously the analysis of individual elected officials. Behind such policy personalities, of course, are advisors, in some cases even teams of support staff, who

may remain unnamed in scholarly publications but are among the 'middling' actors (Larner & Laurie, 2010, p. 219) who perform much of the labour of translating ideas from textual sources, conference presentations or 'policy tourism' (Cook & Ward, 2011). Importantly, while all these and other potentially important actors operate within prevailing ideological norms of neoliberal globalization, there are instances where non-mainstream policies are mobilized through a charismatic politician (e.g., Moore, 2007, on Curitiba) or committed civil society groups (e.g., McCann, 2008, on Vancouver). Irrespective of whether policy mobilization and translocal learning follow the neoliberal script it is necessary to ask who (as well as where) benefits? The answer to that question should not simply be assumed from prevailing ideological expectations – the middle classes, individual consultants, business interests and their political associates in the usual suspect cities and regions – but needs to be discerned through empirical research. Any such scholarly investigation, in turn, must be wary of reading actions and motivations through the lens of established cases, and be correspondingly attentive to spatio-temporal variability in the mixture of opportunities and constraints facing differently positioned individuals, groups and cities.

The importance of examining grounded 'contingencies' rather than relying on critical accounts of ideology has been flagged in research on urban learning (McFarlane, 2011, p. 147) and policy mobilities (Cochrane & Ward, 2012). However, neither of these overlapping strands of relational urban research has given much attention to how academic knowledge production relates to wider politics of learning. One important exception is a recent paper by Wood (2016) which includes reflection on her shift from having been a 'policy actor' in South Africa to conducting academic research on such actors and their learning practices. Wood's reflections lead her to connect 'the messy and convoluted web of policy learning and adoption with our own journey through the academic netherworld' (p. 392). She details similarities as well as specific overlaps between ostensibly separate domains of academic and policy learning, while also elaborating methodological strategies that helped her to retain the 'outsider' distance necessary to 'critically appraise' the learning of her subjects (p. 397). Yet as Wood notes of some of her policy actor informants, even the capacity for critical reflexivity is not a clear-cut point of distinction between scholarly and extra-academic forms of learning. A further similarity, connecting back to the wider literature on the politics of urban learning, is that academic ways of seeing the world are partial, selective – put another way, they are ideologically framed. Postcolonial urban scholarship has demonstrated, for example, how prevailing systems of academic categorization served to make many geographies of comparison and learning almost unthinkable (Robinson, 2006, 2011). Recognition that only certain cities in certain parts of the world (Roy, 2009) and cities of a certain size (Bell & Jayne, 2009) have been deemed suitable for the generation of urban theory likewise reflects ingrained beliefs that sustain uneven distributions of attention and resources (Bunnell &

Maringanti, 2010). Whatever other differences exist between academic and other forms of urban learning, in other words, both are bound up with issues of politics and power, and it may be that extra-academic learning can help cast a critical light on 'our' taken-for-granted academic beliefs as much as outsider distance allows us to say something critical about wider worlds of policy and persuasion (see also Bunnell, 2015).

The following section turns to the city of Solo as a case of relational interurban learning beyond the academy. Practices of learning from Solo are shown both to reflect and to remake urban political geographies. Yet a case where a small Indonesian city becomes the object of different kinds of learning in both a municipality overseas (Pak Kret) and in the national capital region (Jakarta) also suggests the need for further critical reflection on the big city-centredness of academic urban and regional studies.

LEARNING FROM SMALL-CITY SOLO

The overwhelming attention given to Jakarta in urban and regional studies of Indonesia is not only an effect of the tendency to see urbanization in the global South through the trope of the Third World megacity. Nor is it merely diagnostic of a wider big city-centredness. During most of the 20th century, highly centralized national government (re)produced Jakarta's material and imagined centrality to the Indonesian polity. Well beyond the academy, Jakarta became imagined as the leading edge of national transformation, and the origin of urbanization trends (positive or negative) that would diffuse and manifest elsewhere in diluted forms. The fall of President Suharto in 1998 and the subsequent introduction of far-reaching regional autonomy laws have gone some way to unsettling a Jakarta-centred political economy and associated imaginings of urban Indonesia. The decentralization legislation included provisions for the election of the head of the third tier of government (i.e., mayors in the case of cities), who had previously been appointed from Jakarta. Decentralization has brought more attention as well as resources to other cities and regions, much of it negative, either in terms of a down-scaling of the kind of predatory national political economy that existed prior to 1998 (Hadiz, 2004), or the proliferation of neoliberal urban policies that support big business at the expense of ordinary city dwellers (e.g., Peters, 2013).

Most prominent among the more positive sub-national storylines of decentralized Indonesia has been the city of Solo in Central Java province, especially during 2005–12 when Joko Widodo ('Jokowi') served as mayor. Solo and Jokowi became storied through wider informational infrastructure in terms of: the equitable and peaceful resettlement of street vendors into rejuvenated or newly built traditional markets; a local government that, more generally, invests in small business rather than merely wooing or pandering to large investors; expanded provision of public and green space; and involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and popular participation in the planning process (Bunnell et al., 2013). As a result of such stories of success, the city began to attract comparative study tours (*studi banding*) from other city and regional governments seeking to incorporate lessons from Solo into their own city planning and policy-making – not only from elsewhere in Indonesia, but also internationally. These developments, in turn, attracted academic attention, some of which has sought to dig beneath the official storyline of Solo-as-model (Bunnell et al., 2013; Morrell et al., 2011; Phelps et al., 2014), and to decentre Jokowi from narratives of Solo's success (Fahmi et al., 2016). To date, however, no sustained attention has been given to the politics of extra-academic efforts to learn from Solo (at either the local receiving or sending ends), nor to how interurban learning initiatives were bound up with Jokowi's subsequent political move to the national capital. In what follows, each of those two sets of issues is addressed in turn.

Pak Kret and the politics of Solo as a model

During what turned out to be Jokowi's last two years as mayor of Solo, the city was paired with Pak Kret in Thailand under an intercity project by the Partnership for Democratic Local Governance in Southeast Asia (Delgosea). Pak Kret is a municipality with a population of around 180,000, located on the western fringes of the greater Bangkok metropolitan region. Delgosea is a multinational programme, funded by the European Union and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung through the German Ministry of Development Cooperation, which aims to foster municipal interactions sharing best practices in local governance across Southeast Asia. The involvement of Solo and Pak Kret in Delgosea occurred in the wake of moves towards decentralization in Thailand as well as in Indonesia, in which planning – among other functions – was being devolved to provinces and municipalities during the early 2000s (Shatkin, 2004). Pak Kret joined Delgosea with the stated intention of learning ways to manage the rejuvenation of the Pak Kret Old Market along the Chao Praya River. The construction of a road bridge had meant that fewer people were using the old ferry jetty such that many vendors from the riverside market had moved to street-sides and pavements.[2] The municipal government had enjoyed little success in efforts to revive the market. Under Delgosea, Pak Kret was designated a 'pilot city' (to receive knowledge) and linked with Solo as a 'best practice city' (to share knowledge).[3] Solo was considered to be an example of best practice in terms of the 'humane relocation and empowerment of street vendors' (Delgosea Project, 2012, p. 5), particularly from Banjarsari Park to a market in Semanggi.[4] Among the learning activities undertaken by Pak Kret municipal officials with funding from Delgosea was a three-day study tour to Solo in July 2011. This gave the officials an opportunity to observe and learn from counterparts in Solo how the city had managed the relocation of street vendors into thriving traditional markets. The Pak Kret delegation consisted of three municipal officers, including the head of city planning, accompanied by two staff from Delgosea.[5] Prior to the trip, Pak Kret officials were given a report about Solo's efforts in relocating markets, but had little other knowledge

about Solo.[6] The tour itself saw the delegation engage in a schedule of site visits, question-and-answer sessions with various officials, workshops and writing, reporting and reflecting on what they were learning from the tour. On their return to Pak Kret, municipal officials formed a task force including representatives from other layers of government, community organizations and the mayor of Pak Kret in order to develop a 'transfer concept' plan.

The transformative effects of Pak Kret's involvement in Delgosea entailed far more than a straightforward transfer of Solo as a model or solution. Reflecting on their experience with the Delgosea project, including the study tour in Solo, Pak Kret municipal officers commented on differences between the two contexts that made potentially useful ideas and lessons difficult to implement. In particular, Pak Kret's head of city planning contrasted the apparently high level of public engagement undertaken by officials in Solo[7] with the more 'top-down' process in Pak Kret (and Thailand more widely).[8] In the wake of the Solo experience, Pak Kret officials undertook more intensive feedback and planning sessions involving local stakeholders in the Pak Kret Old Market renovation area. Yet, in contrast with the situation in Solo where mayor Jokowi appeared to maintain good relations with market vendors and other stakeholders, a significant barrier to the Pak Kret Old Market renovation project was conflict between Pak Kret's mayor and a key figure in the Old Market area who had stood in opposition to the mayor in a recent local election. This raises the possibility that involvement in the Delgosea project in the first place was motivated by efforts to gain inter- and supranational legitimacy for plans that were being obstructed by a local political opponent.[9] Ultimately, transformation of the Old Market in Pak Kret had as much to do with ideas and practices derived from subsequent study tours to other sites within Thailand (Phuket and Ta Kua Pa) as with Delgosea-sponsored efforts to learn from Solo best practices. While Pak Kret officials attributed the relevance of experiences in Phuket and Ta Kua Pa to the shared Thai national context, more widely efforts to draw upon lessons from a range of other sites points to how a diversity of 'space-times' and 'externalities' are incorporated into what may at first appear to be – and, in this case, was narrated by Delgosea as – a more straightforward channelling of lessons from one city to another (McFarlane, 2011, p. 118).

At the Solo end of the Delgosea inter-municipal pairing, it is worth considering why members of the city government, including mayor Jokowi himself, were willing to invest time and resources in a learning initiative which ostensibly benefitted another city overseas. While it is possible that Jokowi and other high-ranking members of the Solo city government were committed to ideals of supranational regional cooperation and solidarity, surely at least part of the answer to this question has to do with 'policy boosterism' (McCann, 2013). Designation as a best-practice city provided an opportunity for Solo to travel – and to be seen in a positive light – through the 'informational infrastructures' of supranational organizations. For a small city with limited resources for international marketing, involvement in

Delgosea thus provided a way of being imaged as somewhere worth learning from, visiting or investing in. Members of the visiting delegation from Pak Kret certainly detected the image-consciousness of their hosts and suspected that the tour was more about showcasing Solo's successes than a frank exchange of lessons or knowledge:

> We are not sure that the things we saw in Solo were true or fake. Some things looked like they were created to show us. In Solo there are many markets. They took us to see the successful market, but they would not tell us about the market where the management failed.
>
> We found that some markets were not good, but they never talked about that. They never explained why [other] markets have failed.[10]

The fact that the visit was covered in the media in Central Java province meant that whatever selective imaging and 'talking up' (McCann, 2013, p. 6) of Solo did take place was consumed by many more people than the handful of delegates who had travelled from Pak Kret. Taking such practices seriously responds to McCann's call for more attention to be given to local audiences for policy boosterism.

Especially in the context of an era of regional autonomy in Indonesia where local government leaders are directly elected, images of the success (or otherwise) of any given city – or even of a specific policy initiative within a given city – are almost invariably bound up with the legitimacy of its mayor. Members of the study tour from Pak Kret noted that the mayor of Solo seemed to be very concerned with media image:

> When we arrived in Solo, Mr Joko [Jokowi] gave a warm welcome to us. He presented a project about markets and several issues. He invited many journalists to the presentation. Mr Joko paid more attention to the public relations.
>
> I think that he has influenced the media so much because there are many journalists in the presentation.[11]

It is worth pointing out, however, that the study tour took place in July 2011, the year after Jokowi had been re-elected as mayor of Solo. Having secured over 90% of the vote during his re-election, Jokowi's local position was secure. Nonetheless, issues of his personal political legitimacy were certainly connected to policy boosterism in Solo. Jokowi's exceptional margin of victory in being re-elected was at least partly an outcome of local legitimacy gained from media coverage of *earlier* study tours to Solo and other external forms of validation. In 2010 alone, the city had received 27 official study tours, mostly (like the subsequent Pak Kret tour) concerned with the equitable resettlement of street vendors into traditional markets (Phelps et al., 2014). In addition, in October 2010, Jokowi was one of two mayors to receive a national Bung Hatta Anti-Corruption award. Among the justification provided by the judges was that '[t]he municipal administration always communicated with the street vendors instead of just evicting them'. Two important points arise from these signifiers of success. First, Solo's success was almost

always cast as Jokowi's success such that city and mayor became largely synonymous (see Fahmi et al., 2016, for a critical analysis). Second, as in other contexts (McCann, 2013), the fact that Solo/Jokowi were conferred multiple awards and accolades, and were continually re-presented as being worth learning from, made it very difficult for dissenting local voices to be heard. This largely silenced people who believed that developments in the city – even some of those vaunted as best practice success stories – had not been wholly positive.[12]

Given that Jokowi's local political legitimacy had been affirmed so overwhelmingly in the mayoral election of 2010, it seems reasonable to suggest that his concern with public relations during the Delgosea study tour in 2011 was at least partly oriented to audiences beyond Solo and the wider Central Java province in which it is located. This is an observation that can be made even without the benefit of hindsight about Jokowi's subsequent move into capital city-region and national politics. Before he announced his intention to further his political career in Jakarta, Jokowi had had reason to be concerned with national and international, rather than merely local, visibility. Several of the Jokowi/Solo policies and projects that came to be seen as best practices involved national government and/or international donor funding. This was *not* the case for the relocation of street vendors into rejuvenated traditional markets, a process that began near the beginning of Jokowi's first term as mayor in 2005. However, that initial local accomplishment and its documentation and circulation through the media and other informational infrastructure conferred prestige and legitimacy upon Jokowi/Solo as a 'safe bet' for nationally or internationally funded initiatives.[13] In practices of 'municipal statecraft' (Lauermann, 2016), Jokowi became very effective at (re)presenting past successes not just to local or national media but also through participation in international forums including the 22nd session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council in Nairobi, Kenya, in April 2009. A common feature of his presentations was 'before' and 'after' images of suitably transformed places and associated urban lives. The ability to woo national and international funding institutions and agencies in this way became a key component of Jokowi's local development strategy in Solo.[14] The projects that ensued and their circulation as success stories, in turn, helped to launch Jokowi's political career beyond Solo. By the time Jokowi announced his intention to stand as a candidate for the position of Jakarta governor in March 2012, a host of Jokowi/Solo projects were well known as best practice in national networks of learning, and Jokowi himself had become 'a good governance icon in Indonesia' (Hamid, 2014, p. 89). Delgosea became an example of international recognition that could be used to legitimize Jokowi's candidature for a big city leadership position.

From Solo to Jakarta: Jokowi's political mobility and inversion of the national innovation frontier

Jokowi and his running mate Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok) won the Jakarta gubernatorial election in September 2012, defeating incumbent Fauzi Bowo in two rounds. Political commentators have highlighted several aspects of Jokowi's electability, including the popularity of his down-to-earth, 'polite populist' style (Mietzer, 2014), the professionalism of his campaign team, their use of social media in reaching out to younger voters (Hamid, 2014), and the fact that, unlike his incumbent rival, Jokowi had no direct connection with (authoritarian) New Order politics. Prior achievements in Solo were also clearly important – one academic commentator noting of Jokowi's election simply that 'his track record earned him his victory in Jakarta' (Hamid, 2012, p. 342). More precisely, it was not merely Jokowi's local achievements in Solo that were crucial but, as was documented above, the way that 'narrativization' (McFarlane, 2011) of Solo as a model for urban learning allowed both the city and its mayor to circulate in more-than-local networks and informational infrastructures. If the emergence of perceptions of Solo as somewhere worth learning from thus played a role in enabling Jokowi's upward political mobility to Jakarta, the position of governor, in turn, allowed him to mobilize experiences from Solo in the national capital region. The two most high-profile projects of the two years that Jokowi served as governor both drew upon experiences in and lessons from Solo.

The first of Jokowi's high-profile projects as Jakarta governor concerned the relocation of street vendors in the vicinity of Tanah Abang market to a designated building in the market compound named 'Block G'. This involved the so-called *blusukan* style of impromptu site visits and fostering of direct relations with street vendors that Jokowi had pioneered in the celebrated Banjarsari Park vendor relocation in Solo (and had been cited by Delgosea as among the reasons why that city was a suitable best-practice learning site for Pak Kret). Tanah Abang is the largest textile and garment market in Indonesia. Street vendors proliferated in the area after the economic crisis in 1997 when many Indonesians were forced to turn to the informal economy as part of their livelihood strategies. The street vendors appropriated public space and caused (or at least exacerbated) severe traffic jams. Jokowi's two predecessors, Sutiyoso (1997–2007) and Fauzi Bowo (2007–12) had both used the city's security forces (Satpol PP) regularly to 'sweep' the area of street vendors, but the vendors always returned. Among the difficulties involved in resolving the issue was a complex intertwining of interests between ordinary vendors, local market mafia and political figures. Nonetheless, Jokowi launched Tanah Abang Market Block G on 2 September 2013, less than a year after his election as governor. Approximately one thousand street vendors were relocated into Block G, with incentives of free rent for the first year and the introduction of a new lottery to attract shoppers. Jokowi's aides in Jakarta attributed the peaceful relocation to the participatory form of governance – combining official coordination meetings with unannounced personal field visits through which he could meet and talk face to face with the vendors (Hasayangan, 2014) – that had been documented as part of his success story in Solo, although in practice the relocation at Tanah Abang was much more heavy-handed (Simone, 2014).

In addition to applying lessons learned in Solo to Jakarta, Governor Jokowi clearly sought to derive trust and legitimacy from prior mayoral success stories. This is also evident in the second of his most high-profile projects in Jakarta, concerning the revitalization of Waduk Pluit Park. Informal housing on the west side of a reservoir in North Jakarta was relocated through a process that was reminiscent of the resettlement of riverbank dwellers from Pucang Sawit in Solo (Taylor, 2015), and which had similar intended outcomes. In both cases, Jokowi built relations with the affected community members through lunch invitations and informal discussions; and, once agreement to relocate was reached, in both cases affected residents were allowed to dismantle their own homes and to reuse the building materials.[15] Again in both cases, community and wider public support for these relocation projects was strong because they did not involve clearing the land for private (re)development but made it accessible as green public space for all city residents.[16] The close attention that Jokowi and his team paid to media coverage of the Waduk Pluit project (and the Block G project at Tanah Abang) suggests further continuity from his experiences in Solo. However, an important difference was that efforts at media management in the Jakarta projects were much more explicitly concerned with the perceived 'success' of Jokowi as compared with the intertwining of personal and civic boosterism in Solo. In hindsight, this can be understood in terms of Jokowi's ambition for further political upward mobility, from governor of Jakarta to president of Indonesia. At the time when the Waduk Pluit redevelopment process was underway, rumours of Jokowi's presidential ambitions meant that he had begun to accumulate rivals with both the motive and the means to talk down or contest his mediatized claims to success.[17]

Despite highly polarized media coverage of his most high-profile projects as governor in Jakarta, Jokowi was able to refer back to antecedent projects in Solo, the apparent success of which were more difficult to contest given their documentation as part of inter-municipal learning initiatives within Indonesia and internationally. One newspaper article published in an English-language daily newspaper in the lead up to the Jakarta gubernatorial elections noted that 'Jokowi's achievements' had been 'widely reported by the national and international mass media and even documented by numerous academics and published in several academic and peer-reviewed journals'[18] – an example of how academic learning practices can become bound up in wider politics of urban and regional governance. Yet irrespective of how Solo under Jokowi's leadership was documented, and leaving aside the ideological frames that govern whether his projects there *should* be considered as successes, the very election of Jokowi as governor of Jakarta in the first place diagnoses wider belief in the possibility of small city lessons and experiences being extended to the big city level. In the lead up to the gubernatorial election, the suggestion that Jakarta could learn from Solo, through Jokowi, was made by his political allies. Jokowi's vice-mayor in Solo, F. X. Hadi Rudyatmo, for example, was reported as saying that Jokowi's intention in running for governor of Jakarta was 'to help manage Jakarta city to be like Solo'.[19] Mobilization of Jokowi's Solo successes to build the case for his team in the gubernatorial contest is unremarkable at the level of local electoral politics. Yet the plausibility of the notion that it might be desirable for Jakarta to become like Solo or to learn from Solo represents a reversal of ingrained imaginings of Jakarta as the leading edge of national development and innovation.

CONCLUSIONS

In both the Indonesian capital region of Jakarta and in the Thai municipality of Pak Kret urban transformations occurred in relation to prior experiences from the small city of Solo. While both Pak Kret and Jakarta may thus be cast as sites of translocal learning from Solo, the mechanisms and forms of learning that took place in the two regions were clearly different. Pak Kret was paired with Solo as part of a learning network that sought to transfer knowledge between sub-national urban regions in Southeast Asia. In the case of Jakarta, however, it was Jokowi's personal political mobility that spurred projects drawing upon prior experiences in Solo. Heuristic distinctions that are well known to regional studies audiences may be applied to the different forms of learning that took place in Pak Kret and Jakarta respectively: the former involving knowledge that was 'codified' in Delgosea best-practice documentation; the latter involving 'tacit' knowledge that Jokowi had gained from prior embodied actions, experiences and investments in Solo. Yet that distinction is also troubled by the politics of learning that has been foregrounded in this paper. Efforts to transfer codified best practice from Solo to Pak Kret, for example, were entangled with embodied learning that took place during study tours to other cities in Thailand as well as to Solo. Meanwhile, the style of urban community engagement and associated cultural competences that Jokowi brought to Jakarta were, in the practice of realizing his gubernatorial projects, bound up with contested representations and claims to legitimacy.

Issues of politics also mark a point of overlap between recent urban research on learning, on the one hand, and policy mobilities, on the other. Political dynamics examined in this paper include the consideration of how: learning from Solo both expanded that city's horizons of possibility and bolstered Jokowi's local political position as mayor; the more-than-local circulation of 'successes' in Solo that were attributed to Mayor Jokowi in informational infrastructure provided a launch pad for his electability as governor of Jakarta; and Jokowi's upward political mobility, in turn, facilitated further learning from Solo in the national capital region. Overall, then, this study of the politics of learning from small city Solo makes three main contributions. First, it adds to a growing body of work that pays attention to the implications of translocal learning initiatives for the 'sending' or 'exporting' end, especially in terms of possibilities for plugging both a region and its leader into wider (trans)national networks. Second, relating more specifically to (big 'P') electoral politics, this study shows how sending-end outcomes may be a matter of

more than merely *local* political legitimacy. Third, in tracing the wider political geographical trajectory of an elected political leader, the study demonstrates the continued salience of individual-level analysis, not just in work on policy mobilities and translocal learning, but in urban and regional studies more broadly (see also Beal & Pinson, 2014). Jokowi's policy entrepreneurship in and political rise from Solo must clearly be understood in relation to wider infrastructures (which, as has been shown, trouble conceptions of 'sending' and 'receiving' regions), (geo)political structures of opportunity and ideological backdrops, but cannot simply be read off from them.

Finally, it is worth returning to the issue of how the politics of small-city learning relate to our own (academic) learning practices, politics and forms of partiality. In a highly influential article published in this journal, Roy (2009) argued that it is time insights from 'world areas' beyond 'EuroAmerica' became resources for rethinking urban and regional studies globally, rather than continuing to be confined within areal partitions of empirical knowledge. This contribution to 'new geographies of theory' remains profoundly important in postcolonial political as well as theoretical terms. Yet the fact that all the additions to the list of 'great cities' suggested by Roy were large metropolitan centres and city-regions diagnoses a metrocentric hierarchy of attention in her own remapping (Bunnell & Maringanti, 2010). The recent rise of scholarly attention given to small-city Solo runs against both the EuroAmerican centrism that Roy problematizes and the big-city centredness that she unwittingly perpetuates. Yet to what extent does this amount to a decentring of urban and regional studies to small(er) urban regions or 'ordinary cities' (Robinson, 2006)? On the one hand, as has been detailed in this paper, Solo's unexpected prominence in international urban and regional studies has arisen from an extraordinary combination of success stories: (1) in the (big 'P') political domain in terms of the rise of the city's mayor, not only to governor of Jakarta but also subsequently to president of the Republic of Indonesia; and (2) the emergence of Solo as a model or best-practice city in networks of inter-urban learning. Both factors – especially the emergence of Solo-as-model – more clearly diagnose a pervasive success-centrism or 'successism' (McCann & Ward, 2015) in academic work on relational urban learning than growing interest in the place of ordinary cities or regions in global urban theory. On the other hand, while Jokowi's efforts at repositioning Solo in – and himself through – extra-regional learning networks may have been unusually successful, the strategies per se are far from extraordinary. Perhaps especially in many world areas beyond EuroAmerica, participation in inter-municipal learning networks is one of a very limited number of options that leaders of small cities and regions have for acting extra-locally. The conditions under which they do so, and in particular the extent to which leaders can act in ways that exceed the script of neoliberal growth politics, is thus surely something that needs to be afforded greater prominence in global urban and regional studies.

NOTES

1. The other main point of differentiation is that urban policy mobilities work gives primacy to sub-national regional linkages rather than national ones (cf. Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996), while also recognizing the continued importance of the national state (Ward, 2011).
2. Interview with Yongtanit Pimonsathean, lecturer in the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, Thammasat University, and academic resource person for Delgosea in Thailand, November 6, 2014.
3. Pak Kret was one of 16 pilot cities, each of which selected a suitable best-practice city.
4. Initial identification of best practice and pilot cities took place nationally (interview with Mr Worawut Sornmun, Senior Foreign Relations Coordinator, Municipal League of Thailand, Bangkok, Thailand, June 21, 2013) demonstrating the continued importance of this scale in the operation of the inter-municipal Delgosea project. Solo was also selected as a best-practice city by the Cambodian municipality of Choam Chao Sangkat.
5. Interview with Ms Petchada Wetchasri, Head of City Planning, Pak Kret Municipal Government, June 25, 2014.
6. Interview with Ms Rungnapa Kimnguansong, staff of Technical Services and Planning Division, Pakkret Municipal Government, June 25, 2014.
7. 'Meetings, meetings, meetings,' as she put it during a tour of the Pak Kret Old Market. Field notes, May 9, 2013.

8.   Interview with Ms Petchada Wetchasri, June 25, 2014. This interview also forms the basis for the remainder of the current paragraph.

9.   Temenos and McCann (2013, p. 350) note how supposedly best-practice models from elsewhere are 'somewhat armored against local criticism'.

10.   Interview (translated from Thai) with Ms Petchada Wetchasri, June 25, 2014.

11.   See note 10.

12.   Interview with members of Solidaritas Korban Banjir Bantaran (SkoBB), Solo, September 24, 2014.

13.   One prominent example concerns funding made available through UN-Habitat for slum upgrading in Solo. This project, in turn, became documented as best practice in a virtuous circle of legitimacy building (Association of Indonesian City Governments (APEKSI), 2008).

14.   Interview with a consultant to the UN-Habitat Slum Upgrading Facility Pilot Programme in Solo, February 25, 2013. The use of international donors by local government leaders to extend their power and resources has been examined in other Indonesian sub-national regions (Choi & Fukuoka, 2015).

15.   In the case of Waduk Pluit, this was carried out with assistance from police and Satpol PP (BBC Indonesia, 2013).

16.   Interview with Nenek Dela, Waduk Pluit, November 24, 2013.

17.   For example, although Tanah Abang market was projected as evidence of Jokowi's successful leadership in Jakarta by his supporters (much like the Banjarsari Park vendor relocation in Solo), this was dismissed as mere 'image-making' (*pencitraan*) by opponents (*Kompas*, April 15, 2015).

18.   *Jakarta Post* (July 18, 2012).

19.   [*M*]*embantu menata kota Jakarta bisa seperti Solo* (cited in *Kompas*, March 20, 2012).

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