

The Involvement of Media in the Organization of a Local Art Festival in Surabaya Indonesia

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The tension between the economic role and social function of the media, and the line between the media independence and political and/or economical opportunism of the media owners in the context of regionalism in Indonesia needs to be drawn. This paper, thus, looks at the participation of a media organization in the activities of local annual art festival, and how such participation exemplifies a (new) model of media-society relations in the regional context of Indonesia. This paper takes a case study of the organization of Surabaya Art Festival, known as *Festival Seni Surabaya* (thereafter, FSS), and the involvement of one major national media group, based in Surabaya East Java, the *Jawa Pos*, in this annual festival. It shows how such involvement has brought a tension of a potentially contradictory ambition of the media: for its economic or commercial interest and its public good image.

Studies on the political economic of mass communication tend to focus on the pivotal position of media in contemporary politics, and to consider the media as a political institution. The media do have extraordinary political importance. However, as Ian Ward (1995) believes, with their typical characteristics of “privately owned, commercial enterprises and can – unlike, say political parties – be legitimately bought and sold,” the media of course are different from all other political institutions that are ‘public bodies’ (Ward, p. 125). According to Ward, as a distinguished political institution, media may carry information and sometimes shape the course of political events in the place of the media institution. Ward also suggests that the private ownership of the media have emphasised their particular interests into their media news. He has demonstrated some cases of how media moguls in Australia had used their media for their own political ends (Ward, 1995, p.125). Similar to those in Australia, particular media owners in Indonesia such as Surya Paloh, who owns *Media Indonesia* Group, or Aburizal Bakrie and Agung Laksono, the major share holders of ANTV, are examples of those who have used their media for their own political interests in the country (see Sen & Hill, 2000, and Ida, 2006).

However, not for the most part, media proprietors in Indonesia clearly use their media for their political ends. Some of them choose not to become compulsive with their own political position in any governmental or political bodies; rather, they tend to play a significant role in a 'non-political' institution or in other social institutions. The goal is of course pervasive. Such involvement is aimed at securing their existence in the society, while at the same time maintaining and building large regional markets and public acceptance. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to understand a new trend of media behaviour in Indonesia and to look another aspect of the practice of media organization in the society in post-Soeharto era.

The Initial Involvement

Jawa Pos Group is the second largest press empire in Indonesia (Sen & Hill, 2000, p. 58). This publishing company is situated in Surabaya, the central of East Java province. *Jawa Pos* was established as a family concern in 1949. When this provincial press was about to collapse in the early 1980s, Dahlan Iskan, who used to be a journalist of the leading news magazine *Tempo*, was assigned to manage this daily. Within a decade, Iskan had changed the company into one of the top twenty businesses in Indonesia. "*Jawa Pos* has demonstrated the capacity of large city papers to survive and expand into national commercial enterprises" (Sen & Hill, 2000, p.59).

At present, Iskan controls more than 140 companies spanned the archipelago under the holding company PT. *Jawa Pos* Group. The companies hold more than twenty provincial dailies, thirty district (*kabupaten*) dailies, local private television stations in East Java, Riau, and Borneo province, tabloids, magazines, printing companies, paper factory, book publication, and non-press companies in the fields as diverse as hotels, tours travel, real estate and banking. His personal relationships with the East Java government and political elites and with national and provincial major entrepreneurs are very good maintained. In 1999 until 2005, the East Java government appointed Iskan as the CEO of 55 provincial enterprises.

The position of Dahlan Iskan as the major media magnate in East Java province has privileged him in the province. He has been approached both by the provincial and Surabaya city governments and by the many social groups for sponsoring and/or supervising their activities. However, his intention to participate in the organisation of the annual Surabaya art festival (FSS) since 1995 has exemplified a new role of the regional media owner and his organization in the society.

Surabaya art festival was initiated in 1993 by a local artist of Surabaya, Kadaruslan and several other artists. Kadaruslan and his colleagues were

frustrated by the lack of art performance(s) in Surabaya at that time. Using a moment of Surabaya city the 700th anniversary in 1993, these artists voluntarily organised a week of contemporary art festival, namely *Sepekan Seni Surabaya* (Art Week of Surabaya), without the involvement of government and any influential bodies. They invited their colleagues in Jakarta and Surabaya to perform and did exhibition for that event. With the very limit budget and no permanent office, Kadaruslan invited groups of artists from *Aksera* and *Bengkel Muda Surabaya* to organise the festival. The result of Kadaruslan's efforts was impressive. The first and second festival events were successful and granted supportive appreciation from the public in Surabaya.

The success of the festival in 1993 and 1994 had drawn the attention of Dahlan Iskan. Thus, in 1995, Iskan called Kadaruslan and told his intention to contribute or donate some funding to the festival organization. Iskan donated 75 million rupiahs (equal to AUD\$75,000, it was AU\$1 equal to around 1,000 rupiah in 1995). Kadaruslan and his colleagues were so happy to receive that contribution as they were desperately looking for financial supports at that time. In the following year, Iskan was more confident to contribute more funding for the festival than the previous year. So, in 1996, Iskan added some more money for the committee. He contributed in cash for 150 million rupiahs. However, according to Kadaruslan, other than contributing some monies, Iskan did not involve in organising the festival event. Iskan's contribution was not only monies, but also full coverage and promotions of the festival through his newspaper, *Jawa Pos*. As a compensation for being a principal sponsor of the festival, Iskan received an honour to give a speech in the opening ceremony in the 1996 festival and it has been continued since then.

Since much more funding resources contributed to the committee in 1996, Kadaruslan then realised that the festival organization could not be managed by only himself and several artists. He thought that he should invite more participation from the (Surabaya) public. As this art festival is dedicated to the Surabaya public, Kadaruslan decided that the festival should not be privatised or claimed as an individual project. With the spirit for public accountability, therefore, started in 1996, Kadaruslan initiated to establish a social foundation, namely *Yayasan Seni Surabaya* (the Surabaya Art Foundation, hereafter, YSS) in order to invite more funding resources and other possible sponsorships for the continuation of the festival.

Kadaruslan invited Dahlan Iskan from the *Jawa Pos* and later, appointed Iskan as the chairman of the foundation, whilst Kadaruslan took a position as a chief executive, which has been continued up to present. He also asked one East Java governmental officer, Edy Indrayana, an engineer and was the head of financial and development division of East Java province, for the position of a treasurer in the foundation. Kadaruslan invited also two other persons, one was a well-

known Surabaya female actor, Wiwik, as the secretary of YSS and Harun Haryadi, son-in-law of Ciputra, one of the country's wealth entrepreneurs and business empire of Ciputra Group. These five persons have been continuing as board members of *Yayasan Seni Surabaya*. However, according to Kadaruslan, in practical, he has been the only member, who has actively looked after and contributed more to the foundation. He even took a responsibility when the organization of the 1996 festival, which was run for a month, suffered from a financial loss for up to 30 million rupiahs. Kadaruslan had mortgaged his house to forfeit the loss (personal interview, August 2006). He then went to Papua to calm down his life for couple months.

Since 1996, *Yayasan Seni Surabaya* has become an advisory body as well as a funding resources body for the festival. An art week festival was consequently changed its name into *Festival Seni Surabaya* (Surabaya Art Festival, or FSS) and is run every year for fifteen days event. Started from the 1996 festival, the foundation then has formed an annual committee structure consisting of two structural level: first is the steering committee (SC) that is a supervisory body, and the other is the organising committee (OC), which the members change every year. Also since 1996, the committees have invited performers not mainly from Surabaya and Jakarta, but from other regional parts of Indonesia and from overseas such as Australia, Japan, America, and Europe.

The economic crisis in 1997 and 1998 had made the foundation more suffering than in 1996. For two years the festival was terminated. However, when the the country's economic condition started to recover in 1999, the foundation took an initiative to revive the festival. Fortunately, there some funding come from the central government through the so-called '*inpres*¹ funding' (or *dana Inpres*), which was used to run the festival. The *Inpres* was actually allocated to the regional (East Java) arts council (known as *Dewan Kesenian Daerah*, or DKD) as a financial support for art activities in the regional provinces of Indonesia. Sourced by these *Inpres* funding and a contribution from Dahlan Iskan's *Jawa Pos* for 150 million rupiahs, the Surabaya art festival was run again in 1999.

It was then continued in 2000 using the same pattern of format and funding of the 1999 festival organization. The Surabaya Art Foundation (YSS) worked together with the East Java regional arts council (DKD) during those years. However, since 2001, the foundation has become stronger and more supported funding have approached from private sponsors such as *Citra Raya*, one member of Ciputra Groups, *Pakuwon* Group, a local large construction business group in Surabaya, and other non-cash contributions from overseas consulates such as

¹ *Inpres* is an acronym of '*Instruksi Presiden*' (President's instruction). During the New Order era, the Indonesian government provided financial supports for education, cultural activities, and building constructions (for more discussion about *Inpres* see Hal Hill, 1984, William Liddle,...and others).

from France Cultural Consulate (CCCL), British Council, and American Consulate in Surabaya. The more supports arrived to the foundation and the festival organising committee, the more energy and supportive actions for the festival. Since 2001, the Surabaya Art Festival (FSS) has been run for fifteen days from 1 to 15 June every year, and it has also received more supportive responds from the publics, national and regional artists, and overseas performers. FSS, thus, has become one of recognized icons of Surabaya city. Since, this art festival has been acknowledged as the annual event in the official East Java and Surabaya governments' tourism calendar, these two regional governments have allocated some cash funding in their annual budget. However, according to Kadaruslan, the amount given to the festival from these governments was far below the contribution of *Jawa Pos*, which covered almost 70 per cent of the festival costs.

The festival has also become popular and bigger. More regional art performances outside East Java and overseas performers have been invited to participate in the festival. The festival has shown not only contemporary theatres and traditional play e.g. *ludruk* and *wayang* as in earlier organization, but it also starts to run more painting and art installation exhibitions. Moreover, the organising committee has also shown Indonesian feature films and independent movies by the local and regional young film makers in an open air screening (locally known as *layar tancap*). Several film workshops and seminars have also run for the public.

Dahlan Iskan and his newspaper continue to support the festival. Iskan maintains to contribute a cash of 150 million rupiahs every years (this amount now equals to AU\$25,000 as AU\$1=7,000 rupiahs). Adding to that, the *Jawa Pos* newspaper continues to cover the event a month before the festival started and during fifteen days of the festival and two days after the closing ceremony. The company also printed the festival catalogues, banners for all events, and outdoor festival promotions.

For all these contributions, the foundation members including Dahlan Iskan appointed Arif Afandi, who was a chief editor of the *Jawa Pos* newspaper, as the chair of the steering committee from 2000 to 2004. However, since Afandi has been voted as the vice mayor of Surabaya, there has been no single *Jawa Pos*'s people occupy this position. However, in 2005, YSS appointed Arif Santoso, a senior member of board editors of *Jawa Pos*, as a chief executive of the festival. Couple weeks after the selection, Santoso was withdrawn from his position and was replaced by Sandiantoro, an art critics and curator. The withdrawal of Santoso was concealed from the public exposure. Sandi then was promoted in the public as the project officer of the festival. Some speculations were circulated around the issue of Santoso's withdrawal at that time. In fact, Kadaruslan explained in a personal interview that the reason to replace Santoso was mainly

because Dahlan Iskan did not want the people of *Jawa Pos* monopolised the organization of FSS. After this crucial issue, the organising committee of FSS have been fully given to those Surabaya artists.

Behind the Scene of FSS 2006

Although the organising committee of the FSS has been sterilised from *Jawa Pos*'s persons, it does not mean that the involvement of *Jawa Pos* in the organization of the festival is over. Under the management of Dahlan Iskan's eldest son, Azrul Ananda, who has been appointed as the chief editor of *Jawa Pos* newspaper since 2005, *Jawa Pos* maintains its commitment to support the organization of FSS. *Jawa Pos* not only continues to contribute money (150 million rupiahs as since 1996), media coverage one page full for the festival, and organising promotions, the *Jawa Pos* management company also provides assistance to seek sponsorships from private companies for the festival.

In the 2006 festival, *Jawa Pos* management, through the marketing department, offered assistance to the organising committee of FSS to seek sponsorships. The marketing department of *Jawa Pos* sent some of its marketing staffs to seek sponsor from private companies. The deal agreed between the FSS committee and the department was for every account obtained the *Jawa Pos*'s marketing staffs received 10% from the amount obtained, as the incentive for their efforts. This mode of cooperation between the FSS committee and *Jawa Pos* has been seen helpful for the committee members as they, who are mainly artists and actors, do not bother and waste their energy to seek more funding. Sabrot Malioboro, the chairman of organising committee for the 2006 festival, expressed in a personal interview that this deal was advantageous. He said that since many artists lack of experience in dealing with sponsorships. However, Malioboro said that this help will make the organising committee of FSS continually dependent to the marketing department of *Jawa Pos*.

The selection of Malioboro as the chair for the 2006 festival was displeased Azrul Ananda. As Malioboro is a middle aged male artist, it was rumoured that Ananda seemed reluctant to him and to the involvement of some elderly persons (i.e. Malioboro's gang) in the organising committee, which consisted of 40 members. He wished young people for engaging the major roles in the organising committee. To show his disappointment, Ananda approached Meimura, a young male actor and director of Ragil theatre, and treat him as a 'shadow chairman' (*ketua bayangan*) for FSS. Meimura was placed in a position as a chief executive (*ketua pelaksana*), and played an active role in organising the festival. Apart from that, *Jawa Pos* organised the night opening ceremony of the 2006 festival, and Ananda assigned one of *Jawa Pos*'s caricaturists, Leak Koestiya, as the project officer for the opening ceremony moment. All the performances, the stage, the fire works, and all costs of the ceremony were paid by *Jawa Pos*.

Since Ananda has been crowned to be in charge of the *Jawa Pos* and *Indo Pos* dailies, including the *Jawa Pos* News Network (JPNN) by his father in 2005, his roles in the media and in the society of Surabaya has started influential. One of my informants in the FSS's administrative centre explained that as a result of Ananda disappointment with Malioboro, he held the money at the outset and reluctant to hand in to the organising committee. Couple weeks before the festival started, and after Ananda confident with the position of Meimura in the committee, he then transferred the money.

This is not the case when the media proprietors blatantly to use their media as political instruments to build and maintain large heterogenous consumers for their political position. Rather, this is a case of a proprietorial intervention in such public organization, not for the owner's political opportunism, but it is for the economics or the commercial interests of the media. In other words, the efforts, costs, and other contributions made by the media company in this case, have attempted to secure the prospects for growth and profit by spreading the media operation not only across different media and markets, but also into unrelated areas of economic activity as in this art festival. The result is quite pervasive, in which many people have called Surabaya art festival as identical to *Jawa Pos* art festival.

Indeed, state control and ownership in Indonesian media have given way to control by large corporations and 'media moguls'. The media have become predominantly private concerns. The press in Indonesia, particularly, has transformed from a medium of political discourse or an ideological tool for political groups to a commercially significant industry (see Dhakidae, 1991 and Sen & Hill, 2000). Although there are still some media owners continue to use their media for their political interests, there is also another approach attempted by the media owner, who seeks to influence the political processes not by participating directly in the political process itself, but through other social institutions in the society. Therefore, as Schultz (1994, p. 20) notes that it is an irony that the media wish to be seen as to be different to other business, but in fact, the media enjoy and exploit the power of their special roles to serve for the so-called 'public interest'.

Conclusion

Media institution is not only a site of business, investment, and source of employment, but it is also an instrument to extend influence and a long-term economical security and its perseverance. The involvement of large media company and its owner in the organization of the Surabaya art festival has exemplified the model of how the power of the media has been exercised not for the purpose of political interest, but it is for sustaining the growth of the media business.

The initiative of Dahlan Iskan to support the continuation of such local cultural festival is remarkable. His family's enduring commitment and concern to maintain the organization of the public event in Surabaya have become a positive contribution to the local public. Furthermore, his financial contributions have also become essential to fulfil the lack of the festival budget. However, with his financial power, the media proprietor seems to have their hands upon the many levels operating socio-cultural sites of the public, not for the interests of the public, but for the economical opportunism of the media mogul and his business empires.

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