Promoting Sustainable Development through International Collaborations: A Study of Jakarta City of Literature

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Abstract: *Culture is a driver of sustainable development that UNESCO and the world's cities have acknowledged. The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) is a platform that gathers and coordinates cities to adopt cultural elements into their local development, transforming culture into creativity that leads to economic growth. Being labeled as the Creative City of Literature, Jakarta, just like other members of the UCCN, is to demonstrate a steadfast commitment to promote culture-based sustainable development, through various programs, one of which is international cooperation. This study aimed to describe the initiatives of international collaborations taken by the city under the framework of the UCCN, employing a qualitative research method with a case study model and a descriptive analysis. The findings show that Jakarta's international collaborations took shape in three models: hosting international events at home, conducting a joint program with another UCCN member, and participating in international forums overseas. This study offers a perspective that cities in the Global South, rich in cultural heritages, conduct international collaborations as a sign of compliance with the norm of sustainability, strengthening identity within the transnational network mechanism.*
Keywords: sustainability, Jakarta, culture, international collaborations

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has acknowledged a cultural role in promoting sustainable urban development. Under the framework of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), UNESCO gathers cities to work on transforming their cultural assets into a creative industry. According to the official website, the UCCN is now constituted by 408 cities worldwide, including Jakarta (UCCN, n.d.-a).

Indonesia's largest city, Jakarta, along with its counterparts, Gothenburg (Sweden) and Vilnius (Lithuania), was acknowledged to be a member of the UCCN in the field of literature in 2021 (Sidik et al., 2024). Several factors have driven the city to be part of the transnational network, for instance, a vibrant literary culture living in society for decades, a hub of the largest publishing in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, and modern facilities to encourage literacy (Detikcom, 2021; UCCN, n.d.-b). This move was also in consonance with the idea of a global city (Luerdi & Fitria, 2023).

In addition to opportunities to be equal with other world cities, Jakarta is required to comply with the UCCN Mission Statement, developing urban sustainability through culture-based creativity and creative industry. The entitlement of "Jakarta City of Literature" bears a responsibility for international collaborations, particularly within the UCCN framework, specified in the objectives of the Mission Statement page, one of which is to "strengthen international cooperation" (UCCN, 2025).

Figure 1. Logo of Jakarta City of Literature (National Center for Writing, n.d.)

Studies have discussed international collaborations within transnational networks. The UCCN is one of the prominent transnational municipal networks (TMNs) in which UNESCO acts as the principal. TMN, generally, can be defined as a platform for cooperation and transnational interaction among sub-nationals (cities) in cross-border governance, aiming to influence international and domestic policies (Jetoo, 2017). TMNs perform to encourage socialization, learning, and collaboration (Lee, 2018). When cities belong to a TMN, they succumb to certain norms, learn from counterparts' best practices, and cooperate on certain issues.

UNESCO acts as a norm entrepreneur to promote culture as a source of sustainable development, initiating an experiment of the "Creative Cities Network" (Luerdi, 2023). This process begins in a series of stages, starting from

agenda setting to norm institutionalization (Luerdi, 2023). Intercity cooperation reflects the institutionalization of the norm of sustainability, understood as "social structures are taken for granted, expected to be habits, and widely accepted" (Hassan & Gil-Garcia, 2008; Keman, 2017). Intercity cooperation within the UCCN, combined with local resources, contributes to Creative Cities development (Zhu & Yasami, 2021).

Rosi (2014) suggests the relations between branding, intercity cooperation, and city identity. Branding is a communication strategy used by cities to connect and mold cooperation with other members, and from which the best-practice sharing takes place. The aspects of branding and sharing do matter to build a stronger city identity. Rosi (2014) also argues that there has been a strong trend for more effective collaborations and joint program implementations among cities. Branding, in fact, is also the major motivation among cities to join the UCCN. The global recognition of the UCCN and labelling as "Creative Cities" brings about economic impacts, such as attracting visitors, skilled labor, and investors to the cities (Gathen et al., 2021; Pearson & Pearson, 2017).

Studies demonstrate that collaborations, particularly within the UCCN, are the common practice to enhance sustainable development at the local level, through creativity and creative industry driven by cultural elements. However, the case of Jakarta's international collaborations after its accession into the network is still understudied. This study aims to describe the initiatives of international collaborations that the city performed for the period of 2021-2025. This study offers a perspective from one of the largest cities in the Global South, admitting culture as a driver for local development.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method used in this study was a qualitative approach with a case study, aiming to understand a phenomenon within a specific context deeply. The analysis model applied was descriptive, focused on describing and interpreting data in line with the research focus. The data used were secondary, collected through library research, including scholarly journals, official documents, and other relevant sources related to the research topic. The data analysis technique followed the model developed by Miles et al. (2014), involving several steps: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Through this cyclic process, the results could be presented systematically, validly, and meaningfully.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
3.1 Overview of UNESCO's Creative Cities of Literature

The UCCN is a transnational network initiated by UNESCO in 2004. More and more cities have shown their interest and been admitted into the network since then. The UCCN's role is in line with the SDGs implementation, particularly SDG 11, "Sustainable Cities and Communities." The UCCN works on seven thematic areas or creative fields: craft and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, media arts, and music (UCCN, n.d.-a). Each thematic area is emboldened in the form of sub-networks (i.e., Creative Cities of Craft and Folk Art, Creative Cities of Design, etc.) with their distinct programs. Cities seeking membership are open to apply for one of the areas and are required to pass all assessment criteria, considered an initial commitment to sustainability (Luerdi, 2023). To be designated as the Creative City of Literature, for example, a prospective city must be able to meet the requirements as follows:

Table 1. Membership Criteria for Creative Cities of Literature

- quality, quantity, and diversity of editorial initiatives and publishing houses;
- quality and quantity of educational programs focusing on domestic or foreign literature in primary and secondary schools as well as universities;
- urban environment in which literature, drama, and/or poetry play an integral role;
- experience in hosting literary events and festivals aiming at promoting domestic and foreign literature;
- libraries, bookstores, and public or private cultural centers dedicated to the preservation, promotion, and dissemination of domestic and foreign literature;
- active effort by the publishing sector to translate literary works from diverse national languages and foreign literature;
- active involvement of media, including new media, in promoting literature and strengthening the market for literary products.

Source: UCCN (2007)

Upon being designated with the status as the City of Literature, a member city can attain multiple advantages. The membership status encourages the capacity development of local literacy communities, paving the way to programs, training, and global support that focus on culture-based sustainable development. The entitlement from the authoritative global body, like UNESCO, also enables the image as a hub of creativity and innovation in terms of literature, as well as attracting tourists, authors, and cultural investors, contributing to urban creative economic growth (Gathen et al., 2021; Pearson & Pearson, 2017). In addition, it provides opportunities to build international networks with those with a similar vision. Regarding the latter, international cooperation is not only beneficial for member cities but also a commitment compliant with the common mission of the UCCN, "placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of development

plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level" (UCCN, n.d.-a).

3.2 Jakarta's International Collaborations

Upon UNESCO's announcement as a member of the UCCN, Jakarta has been officially labelled "Jakarta City of Literature" and allowed to use the UCCN logo as branding embedded in its public policies. Since its admission into the network, the city has been conducting a series of international collaborations to promote sustainable development, particularly in terms of literature,

demonstrating its commitment to the network's mission. The international collaborations took shape into several programs or events, categorized into three models as follows:

Table 2. Jakarta's International Collaborations (2021-2025)

Models of Collaboration/ Cooperation	Names of Events	Forms of Activities/Sub-events	International Engagement/ Involvement
Hosting international events by engaging foreign participants	Jakarta International Literature Festival	Writer forums, poetry sessions, theatrical and music performances, community projects and workshops, etc.	Foreign literary activists, poets, novelists, etc.
	Jakarta World Novel Week	Digital literacy and e-book publishing workshops, workshops for novelists and emerging writers, exhibitions, etc.	Foreign novelists, writers, publishers/agents, etc.
	Jakarta International Book Fair	Talks, seminars, writer forums, book launches, etc.	Foreign publishers/agents, exhibitors, writers, etc.
	Jakarta Content Week	Workshops, master-class series, etc., some of which align with literary development	Foreign exhibitors, writers, content creators, etc.
Conducting a shared/collaborative project together with another member of the Creative Cities of Literature	Bridging Cities: Exeter x Jakarta	Commissioned writing and publishing, exhibitions, etc.	Exeter City of Literature, British Council
Attending/participating in international events overseas	UCCN Annual Conference	Forums for exchanges of best practices, prospective collaborative programs between member cities, etc.	-
	UNESCO MONDIACULT	Intergovernmental plenary sessions, thematic technical debates, side events, and exhibitions.	-

Source: compiled by the author.

Hosting annual international events was the most frequently executed model of programs by Jakarta. Some programs even had run before Jakarta's entitlement as the City of Literature, for instance, Jakarta International Literary Festival in 2019, Jakarta International Book Fair in 1981, and Jakarta Content Week in 2020, respectively, for the first edition. Before the designation, such self-initiated programs could be helpful to meet the requirements of membership inclusion. While post the designation, they remained necessary to show commitment to the development of literature in the city.

The World Novel Week is a global campaign initiated by UNESCO during the 40th session of

the body's 2019 General Conference. Having adopted into a strategic program of the Creative Cities of Literature, all members are to host such an event annually to celebrate and strengthen the role of novels in building imagination, empathy, and intercultural dialogues. In the case of Jakarta, several sub-events were facilitated, like digital literacy and e-book publishing workshops (UNESCO, 2022).

All of the events were collaboratively organized, involving the municipal government agencies and non-governmental local actors, such as the Jakarta Arts Council, Indonesian Publishers Association, and other communities. The events also involved foreign participants as

important stakeholders, facilitating interaction and furthering collaborations between local and international literary activists, writers, artists, and more. The initiatives aimed to maintain and foster a supportive domestic environment for literary development and promote Indonesian literature worldwide. In addition, hosting international events at home is believed to help embolden the city's identity, as practiced by several cities nowadays (Kolokytha, 2022; Sidik et al., 2024).

"Bridging Cities: Exeter x Jakarta," held in 2025, was a shared or collaborative project between Jakarta and Exeter, both are members of the Creative Cities of Literature. Sponsored by the British Council, the collaboration aimed to strengthen relations between cities. Through the program, for example, the commissioned writing and publishing, writers from both cities had opportunities to learn and collaborate in creating space for intercultural dialogues, raising the issues of the climate crisis in literature (Exeter City of Literature, n.d.). The intercity cooperation not only expands the creative networks between cities but also emphasizes the role of culture as a means of cultural diplomacy.

Participation in international oversight forums is another form of global collaboration, such as the UCCN Annual Conference and the UNESCO MONDIACULT. The UCCN Annual Conference is a regular gathering involving all the UCCN member cities. Meanwhile, the UNESCO MONDIACULT or the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, is the largest cultural policy conference and advocacy platform attended by global stakeholders, including representatives of states, international organizations, and NGOs (UNESCO, n.d.). The MONDIACULT 2025 edition was hosted by Spain, with Indonesian delegates from the Ministry of Culture, along with the Indonesian UCCN focal points; Jakarta City of Literature and Bandung City of Design, participating in the event (Jakarta City of Literature, 2025). The gathering events offer platforms for policy dialogues, sharing best practices, and exploring potential collaborative programs (Luerdi, 2023).

Urban development of literature will be in line with the prospective publishing industries and literary tourism, with government and non-government participation, all contributing to a vibrant literary ecosystem. International collaborations, for Jakarta and the UCCN members, had dual faces: benefits as well as responsibility. They acted as platforms that facilitated the exchange of ideas and experience or best practices among cities and fostered prospective collaborations among cities. However, the implementations also portrayed the city's lasting commitment to sustainable development as stipulated in the Mission Statement.

Jakarta, just like other cities within the UCCN, is required to compile and submit a periodical report to UNESCO as a form of accountability and evaluation of steadfast commitment in advancing culture and the creative industry. The report tells several programs, including international collaborations, that have been done to support urban sustainable development (UCCN, 2021). Through the reporting mechanism, all member cities not only showcase their achievements and best practices, but also contribute to intercity exchanges of knowledge and innovation at the global level (Luerdi, 2023). Thus, this process becomes an important means in cementing the networks of international cooperation as well as ensuring that culture and creativity remain the main pillar of sustainable development at the local level.

4. CONCLUSIONS

All cities that belong to the UCCN have a responsibility to carry out international collaborative initiatives to advance sustainable development, rooted in culture and transforming it into an urban creative industry. As the City of Literature, Jakarta demonstrated its commitment through several international collaborations, whether hosting international cultural events, initiating a joint program with a counterpart city with a similar entitlement, or participating in international forums organized by UNESCO. The efforts represented the compliance as well as dedication of the city in developing local cultural potentials by building constructive transnational interactions. This study underscores that Jakarta, one of the UCCN members from the Global South, exemplifies how a city can navigate cultural assets to pave urban sustainable development through active international engagements, instruments for strengthening local identity, in addition to compliance with norms within the transnational framework.

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