Color Chirp: Poking The Idea of Coexisting Living with Urban Birds in Bandung Through a Speculative-Participatory Method

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Abstract
A city is an ecosystem inhabited by humans and many species of flora and fauna. The growing development of man-made structures made the tension between human and the other species is rising as the open green space are limited. This dense space created friction and pressure between the inhabitants which could lead to species depression and extinction. This art creation was framed to work with the idea of poking the public’s awareness of urban birds existence around them, as a way to generate the idea of coexisting living with birds in the urban environment. As a result, the artwork “Color Chirp” was created from collected color chips using a speculative-participatory method where fifty-four Bandung citizens were asked to color the outline drawing of twenty-two birds species in Bandung based on their memory, imagination, or prediction. Each color chip was recreated then juxtaposed to show participants’ color schemes in comparison to the actual colors of the birds. This work shows the speculative visual color from their realm of memories, imagination, and prediction of urban bird is different than reality, moreover, the idea of coexisting living is still vague for most of them.

Keywords: art creation; Bandung; coexist; colors; participatory; public awareness; speculative; urban bird; urban environment

1 Introduction
A city park is a man-made green space near human habitation. An ecological place for urban wildlife biodiversity to grow and bloom. Where it provides a habitat to live, a sanctuary, and a place for animals to forage food including for the urban birds. Urban birds is a general term used for birds who live and roam in urban or city area. Consciously or not, we shared this urban space with them and we are supposed to live to coexist with them, as they are also the citizens of this urban space. Urban space itself facing serious global issues regarding the density of the population. The United nation reported there are 55% of the world citizens live in urban areas in 2018, and this percentage expected to increase to 68% by 2050 [1]. Bandung is the capital city of West Java Province is one of the densest cities in Indonesia with an area of 167,31 Km² and populated by over almost 2.5 million citizens [2]. Ideally, 30% of a city area must be dedicated to green space [3]. However in reality, based on data in 2015, Bandung only has 12,15% of green space which far from ideal condition [4]. As a visual artist who is interested in the issue of humans, animals, and the space we shared, I am curious about this idea of coexisting living with the urban birds. Do the citizens of Bandung know the idea of coexisting living with these urban birds? Do the citizens of
Bandung realize about these urban birds existence?

This art project trying to poke the participant’s awareness about the existence of urban birds in Bandung based on their memories, imagination, and prediction of their visual feathers color presentation. The word “poking” was used as this art-making was initiated not to solve a problem but more like an artistic nudge to participants’ awareness in a more fun casual way.

I incorporated the speculative-participatory method in this art-making process to involve the citizens of Bandung as participants and combined it with the spirit of a speculative approach based on the idea of “preferable future” section on Potential Future by futurologist Stuart Candy [5]. The idea of this section is about to open up any possibilities that can be debated and use collectively to define a preferable future. Hypothetically, this speculative approach will show Bandung citizens’ expectation on the noticeable urban birds’ color scheme in their preferable future realm.

I decided to frame this participatory project by asking the participants to color the bird outline drawing then recreated the color schemes as one cohesive artwork. Moreover, as an artist who also likes birdwatching activity, I found color is the first visual bird’s appearance which easily recognizes and memorizes in a glimpse. As Louis Bourgeois said “Color is stronger than language. It’s a subliminal communication” [6].

2 Methodology & Materials

2.1 Overview of experiments

I started this art project, by using scientific data about urban birds in Bandung by Endah and Partasasmita in Bird diversity in Bandung City Park [7]. I used their list of urban birds species as the ground base of this art-making process. Based on its spread population, they were at least twenty-three birds recorded roamed in Bandung. However, for this project, one species domestic chicken (Gallus gallus domesticus) was outed as a they have too many color variations.

Instead of asking the participants to answered and fill a commonly written survey about these birds, I asked them to color the prepared bird outline drawing as a more active artistic way to seek their awareness about the existence of these urban birds. To put it into consideration, I did not intend to collect a perfect accurate color nor perfect coloring techniques from the participants. This art-making process was intended to grabbing the feather’s color appearance of these birds from participants’ memories, imagination, or prediction through a fun and active way with less stress on the techniques or quality.

Figure 1. Re-illustrated twenty-two birds species in Bandung by the artist
2.2 Population and Sample

There were fifty-two participants involved. The main requirement of the participant was the person has to be a Bandung citizen, living or visiting the Bandung area before and the project was targeted to a population ranging from age 4 to 55 years old. During the coloring session, I also generated an active discussion with the participants about the existence of urban birds. The provided outline drawing was served with the name of the bird species written in Indonesian, English, some local traditional name, and scientific name. These written names were provided as the only clue to generate participants’ name-related memories or provoking their color decisions, as some of the bird names mentioning a color name.

2.3 Location

This first participatory event took place at Kiputih Satu during their outdoor weekend market. The participants gathered on the first event was ranged from children, university students, and some young professionals. To gather different participants from a different higher education background, the second participatory event was held at the CADL Building in ITB.

2.4 Limiting Conditions

For this project, I asked the participant to color the bird’s appearance on the outline drawing I recreated based on an illustration from HBW Alive [8]. The task of coloring is familiar to any age and easier to do by anyone with different artistic experience. I also asked the participants to colored their chosen bird by only using the oil pastels set I provided.

2.5 Procedure and Sampling Technique

I provided eighty-eight sheets of bird outline drawings, compiled from twenty-two bird species. I collected four colored sampling sheets from each species. To make sure the participants can also coloring using white color oil pastel, each outline drawing was printed on an ivory color paper. The simple rules of the participatory process were (a) Each participant can choose they preferred bird species from the list without coloring the same species sampling twice. (b) the participants were not allowed to search the bird information from the internet or books. The participants can only access the information based on their memories, imagination, prediction, and the written species name on the sampling sheet. (c) The coloring material was limited to oil pastels provided. (d) As the artist, I did not give them any color suggestions, but during the coloring process, I generate a casual discussion about the urban bird and ask the reason why they pick the color. (5) There is no strict time limit, however, the participants must finish their coloring in one sit.

From the participants’ colored outline drawing, I picked five color sampling from the most dominant colors the participant used on each species. Mostly these colors were spread on bird’s head or beak, neck, wings, breast, and tails. Some participants colored the background paper and made a texture with the oil pastels. However, I did not put this background color and textures into consideration. This project sampling is only limited to collecting visual colors applied to the birds drawing.
Figure 2. Schematic procedure of sampling technique

Figure 3. Eighty-eight colored drawings collected from the participatory events

2.6 Materials

I provided several sets of twelve color oil pastels for the participants to color the sampling sheets. These oil pastels were produced by Pelican, Germany. As written on its packaging, the twelve colors are White, Yellow, Pale Orange, Orange, Red, Brown, Yellow Green, Green, Sky Blue, Cobalt Blue, Purple, and Black. I chose oil pastel as the medium for its familiar and practical reason. It has this easy-characteristic in showing the expressive color and can be mixed quite well. I also used the same set of oil pastels to make the final artworks.

3 Discussion and Result

On the initial plan of this art project, my intention was only to collect the colored drawings from the participants and present it as it is as the final works. However, I was curious how to turn these collected colored drawings into cohesive works which also has the speculative spirit of suggesting a "preferable future" realm from the participants. I have an interior design education background and professionally trained as one. As an interior designer, I use color schemes as a tool to suggest or showing the preference of the color we are going to use as an idea of a space. A color scheme is
a set of color chips commonly used as a color guideline. I see the connection from the purpose of
a color schemes with presenting this color sampling as a speculative color guide.

I collected eighty-eight colored drawing sampling sheets as a source of my artwork. A single color
scheme contains five color chips. I picked and replicated these main five color chips manually
and each color chip was presented on a square paper chip. Furthermore, I juxtaposed these color
chips and arranged them in a line creating a color scheme. I presented each species color schemes
from the participants in a panel paper board along with a color scheme based on the real scientific
illustration from HBW Alive illustration. As a final step, I placed the five-color scheme in order
from the closest color on the top to the furthest color scheme on the bottom, creating a five-row
of color schemes from each species of urban bird.

During the coloring process, I casually discussed with the participants about the urban birds,
coexist living, and also their color choice while they coloring the bird drawing. This discussion
revealed several scenarios of participants’ color choice decisions. Based on the discussion with the
participants I categorized the color choice decisions based on four groups. The first group is those
who colored the bird as they have seen the bird in real life and have memories about the bird’s
appearance. As a sample, a color schemes from a participants’ Javan Kingfisher sampling sheets
almost match the color scheme I took from the scientific bird illustration. The participant has seen
the Javan Kingfisher before and has a strong memory of this bird species.

The second group is those who colored the bird drawing based on their mixed-memories of the
bird visual. There was a participant who colored a Spotted dove in a mixed purplish-green color,
where the real color is completely different. A discussion with her revealed the reason, It was based
on her mixed visual memory of a drawing on warung’s (street food stall) banner, which sells fried
pigeon as a cuisine. In general, pigeon and dove share physical shape similarities and came from
the same Columbidae family, although the color scheme is completely different.

The third group is those who colored the bird based on their prediction after reading the bird name
written on the provided sampling sheet. This mostly occurred on Scarlet-backed flowerpecker
sampling sheets. In Indonesian, this species called Cabai Merah, which translated red chili. None
of the participants who colored this species knew or have seen the bird in real life. However, the
bird name drove the participants to use red to color the drawing sheets as a major color. In reality,
It is true this species has a distinctive red color, but only on the bird’s head running to it’s back.
The majority color of this bird was black and greyish white on the contrary.

The last group is those who have no idea at all about the bird’s appearance and coloring the
outline drawing completely based on their likes of certain color and imagination of how the bird
is supposed to look like on their mind. From the general discussion with all four groups I noticed
despite they have to think hard about the birds color, they were all absorbed on the activity of
coloring with oil pastels as its a good reminder of the joy on the artmaking process.

I visualize these colored bird drawings from the participants as their preferable urban birds
appearance as seen and live on their minds. From this idea, I decided to present my final artwork
in the form of urban bird color schemes set. The final artwork is a speculative visual color scheme
guidelines of the urban birds as seen and collected from participants’ memories, imagination,
and prediction. Suggesting the possibility of the noticeable color appearance of the urban birds
in the realm of participants’ preferable future. Speculatively, if the urban birds have this color
appearance, the Bandung citizen awareness of the urban bird will be better and hopefully, they will
consciously start to live to coexist with the urban birds.
On a further discussion, there is an artwork from the artist Robert Zhao Renhui which also talk about the existence of bird and environmental issue in general. The work titled “The Lines We Draw” exhibited on his solo show at Yalu River Art Museum, Dandong - China (2019).

There are similarities and differences I found from my works and this specific Renhui’s work. In similarity, we both talked about the existence of bird species in urban space. My work was based on the bird population in the city of Bandung, Indonesia, and Renhui’s was based on the bird population in the city of Dandong, China. We both also talked about the anxiety and worries about the ecological destruction of the natural environment and our awareness and how the future will be if these destruction keeps happening.

Environmental issues have been one of the art themes in this age of Anthropocene, where the human activity starts having an impact on the nature of this planet and ecosystems. My ecological anxiety came from the rapid development of man-made structures in urban space. This development could create friction and pressure between the inhabitants and lead to species depression and extinction, in this case, the urban bird population in my city Bandung. Moreover, our lack of awareness about these urban bird existence is a start of a bigger environmental disaster. Renhui’s work was generated based on the existence of bird species of Godwit and Great knot from the Dan Dong wetlands in Yalu River. The wetland itself now remains as one of the last important sanctuaries spots for the migration of these birds while the other spot is concretized. As written on the curatorial notes from Renhui’s exhibition: “.. (the work) is a visual presentation that conveys warnings and foreknowledge of ecological destruction using the methods of reconstruction and displacement. Thus, the show reflects the multi-faceted reactions that we and Zhao have to everything about the present and future, but it also shows his anxiety about the natural environment and human ecological crisis, and it suggests a kind of vigilant tension” [9].

The difference between my work and Renhui’s work lay on the approach or method of how the works were built and the way we present the artworks. I used the participatory process to engage and involve the citizen of Bandung to generate their memories, imagination, and prediction about these urban birds’ color appearance then developed and presented it in a set of manual made speculative color schemes. While Renhui approaches the issue through his scientific method of photography and computer editing, and the temporal and spatial visions of bird migrations and presented it in large images. From this comparison, even though we used a different method in developing our work, I see both of us work as an artist who trying to push and create a visual awareness about the environmental issue we are facing through an artistic approach.

### 3.1 Implication of Findings

From the discussion with the participants, I categorized them into four groups based on how they decide the color they used. A group who had memories of the birds, a group who did color-predict based on the name of the bird, a group who have mixed-memories of the bird, and the last group who completely relied on their imagination and likes of color as they have no idea how the bird’s looks like. From the discussion and looking at their colored sampling sheets, most of the participants goes to the last group. Sadly from the discussion I had with the last group, they never consciously pay attention to the urban birds around them. Their awareness about the urban bird existence is still low while the idea of coexisting living is still vague.

From the complete twenty-two color scheme panels I built, it showed most participants thought that these urban birds have more bright colorful color schemes in general. In reality, only a few
bird species on the list had colorful and some bright color scheme. Most of these urban bird species are covered in dark and muted color schemes from black, brown to green, or camouflage colors as a way to survive in their habitat. Some species have a distinctive color accent as in the Sooty-headed bulbul with its pale rumps or unmistakable violet back and belly on Javan kingfisher [10].

My final artwork related to the fact of how the urban birds’ color appearance who live and noticeable in participants’ mind is mostly different compared to reality. As the artist my intention from this artwork is to suggest a speculative color schemes guidelines of urban birds from the participant’s preferable future realm as a poke to the issue of coexisting living with the urban birds in the city of Bandung.

3.2 Potential Future Research

I realized if this art making process will generate a deeper observation if supported with a better well planned audio-visual data recording from the beginning and a more selective group of participants. I presume a recorded conversation between the artist and the participants while the participatory take action will give further observation material. One of the potential future research could be specified on a certain group participants from certain socio- backgrounds. Then the research can observe further, comparing the color choice from a different group of socio-background and relate the findings to their awareness of coexisting living with the urban birds.

4 Conclusion

I chose a speculative-participatory method as an artistic engaging way to collect visual color schemes of the urban birds who live and noticeable in Bandung citizens’ memories, imagination, and prediction. The color schemes collected presented in my final artwork title “Color Chirp”\(^1\). This artwork consisted of twenty-two panels of color schemes presenting twenty-two species of urban birds.

\(^1\) The title: Color Chirp was a pun from the word “chirp”, a small repeating sound of a bird.
birds roaming in Bandung citizens’ preferable future realm in comparison to the real color schemes I collected from scientific bird illustration. I did not presented the final artwork to scientifically prove the awareness of Bandung citizens on coexisting living with urban birds. However, through this art making process and joy of coloring, this speculative-participatory method I used has poked the participants awareness on the coexist living with the urban birds in Bandung.

5 References


