

The Secrets Behind the Making of a Beautiful City: Jakarta

by Ilya Maharika

The antithesis of the beautiful

Every environmental value requires its antithesis for definition. Home would be meaningless without journey, the countryside requires its counter-image the city and vice versa.⁽¹⁾ And beauty needs the beast in order to exist in our minds. According to the geographer and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan, nature has long been regarded as the antithesis of the human domain, the city. But its position is constantly changing. Neolithic and archaic societies regarded beauty and the secrecy of their gardens and village as the antithesis of the profane wilderness outside. In many societies by the middle of the 19th century, the split between city and nature had occurred resulting in the creation of an Eden-like "middle landscape." Since then, this specific concept transforms landscape into a new city between urban sprawl as the "true wilderness" on one side and the "treated wilderness" of the recreational nature on the other. Hence reformulating from Tuan's anatomy of the wilderness, this new city, which lies between true wilderness and treated wilderness, is the only "beautiful city" in our state of mind. In practice however, this beautiful landscape can only be built in a form of an insular space. It is cut off from both forms of wilderness surroundings.

Insular space, or the product of the logic of insularity, is a materialization of the love of place, of a carpentered space, of beautiful space. Its purpose is to domesticate the wilderness of the city. Nowadays, insular space becomes an inevitable response of globalization, which produces a violent

and brutal image of the city as well as explosion of the city size beyond ability of human perception to cope. Gated communities, cities within city, the "city square" (which in fact in a form of private mega structure architecture barely a square in the original meaning) are part of a space where social relations are fully designed, controlled and surveilled within privatized environments. Here also, the so-called beautiful environment means a fully controlled beauty omitting the unwanted such as homeless or beggars and deviant behaviors in general. At last, social space of urban community is shrunk. The longing for beauty ends in insularity: physical explosion of cities size and at the same time the implosion of social spaces of the citizens into insular territories.

The Beauty and the Insular: The Case of Jakarta

To many Indonesians Jakarta, the capital of the country, called *ibukota* in Bahasa Indonesia which means "the mother city", is where the beauty is desired. Since its beginning, this city was idealized as having a beautiful European atmosphere in a tropical setting, just like Batavia (1619 to 1945) was designed in the spirit of the European ideal city. Indeed, later it gained a great appreciation as the Queen of the East by the Europeans who traveled to the Dutch colony. However, the city was an island by itself since it was completely disconnected from the swamps and villages surrounding it.

The harbor was the only connection and it connected the city to the Netherlands rather than to its surrounding community and environment.

Modern Jakarta is also a story of insularity. Jakarta's urban riot from the 13th to the 15th of May 1998 led to the proliferation of insular spaces and territories where social space is exploded into fragments of privatized and corporate spaces.⁽²⁾ Space in this post-conflict era is devoid of context, a phenomenon that Sorkin has called an "ageo-graphical" city.⁽³⁾ New super-malls, super-blocks and gated communities mark the new trend of places that have less and less contact with their surroundings. The doctrine of this property development boom is, to produce superlatives: "the biggest, the tallest, the largest and the wealthiest" which does not fit with messy do-it-yourself kampung environment surroundings. Propagated by corporate interests, this credo is transforming Jakarta into a jungle of privately-built super-blocks and walled-off environments. These lucrative projects are instigated with several goals in mind. First they are part of a marketing strategy to keep up in the race to be globally competitive, to be the "beautiful window of the world." Second, as a result of the May 1998 urban riot, these enclaves are also manifestations of the "right" to create detached space wherever the desire for security is large enough and prestige, wealth, and the desires for certain lifestyles are concentrated. The Zeidler Grinnell Partnership's "City of BNI", Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM)'s Four Seasons-Regent International of "island oasis," to Kuningan CBD, and Sudirman Square, are some examples some of the developments that are completely or largely disconnected from their kampung surroundings. They are a place to retreat from wild urban space.

However, not only in the city core are these "city within a city" developments growing. In suburban Jakarta the concept has been translated into the expansion of new corporate towns, most of them are gated and fenced, disconnected from the rural villages surrounding them.⁽⁴⁾ But this is not the whole story. The spatial implosion is exacerbated by the decentralization policy that is a part of political reform in the aftermath of the 1998 crisis. The policies empower municipalities, resulting in hundreds of new "small centers" with little control and coordination from the central government and with weak and often corrupt local administrations. Especially in Java, decentralization ignites sharp competition between regencies and townships. Development is completely un-orchestrated setting off competition to increase local revenue while there is almost no coordination between administrative bodies. Because of this phenomenon, space and architecture gain significance. All of these small cent-

ers try to exercise their power by tracing their territories to seek out any related resource to increase local revenue. Territory becomes valuable since it can be directly linked to foreign investment and it offers the possibility to collect taxes from commodities passing through. Here too, on a smaller scale, especially in secondary cities, gated communities and walled settlements are proliferating.

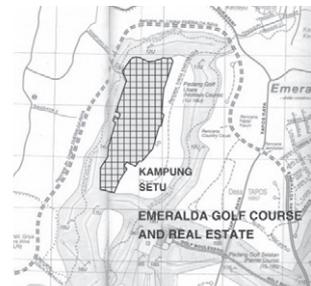
My own survey on gated communities in Yogyakarta, a middle-class city in central Java, reveals the fast application of this insular strategy. We found that many newly developed housing estates, especially those built after the economic crises of 1998, share characteristics with gated communities such as gates, perimeter walls and security personnel as well as bearing names associated with the beauty of the nature. They are developed not in large scales but rather, we see small-scale housing estates ranging from mere 20 units of houses to several hundreds units, with an average of about 50 units. However their numbers are increasing rapidly. Within past 5 years more than 383 new estates have been built. The research indicates that the development of these "mini gated settlements" is a product of a series of factors: the motivation to seek security, weak regulations concerning changes in land use, change in values of the community toward a more modernized and individualized one, strategy of the developers to avoid long bureaucratic processes on building housing estates (as there are more complicated requirements for housing estates with more than 50 houses), weak control and laissez-faire planning by the urban authority and the image of Yogyakarta as a safe city and city for pensioners. Despite their beautiful buildings and landscaping, the developments have serious consequences as they ignite a series of small-conflicts between new-comers who reside within the estate and the native inhabitants of the kampungs where the "islands of estate" are located. Moreover, they create a highly fragmented urban development which is not welcome by urban authority and the community. ⁽⁵⁾

The Cost of Making Beautiful

The cost of the developments of this beautiful ambient are high. First, the developments need to erase parts of and protect themselves from kampungs - the "wilderness". Hence, quite predictably, more development means also more kampung evictions. Not all kampungs end in sudden extinction through eviction, but some are in the process of being



Some kampungs may indeed solidify and become more established forming a compact yet high density and mature settlement (a kampung in southern Jakarta).



Example of isolated kampungs. The first kampung is isolated by the BSD City, the second by lucrative development and the third by a golf course.

isolated by the developments. There are many islands of kampung trapped by commercial areas or housing estates. One kampung is caught in the corporate town of BSD City in Tangerang (Greater Jakarta). Another kampung in eastern Jakarta is encircled by Emerald Golf Course and Real Estate – one of the most prestigious golf course in city. More and more kampungs are trapped in lucrative developments with little connection to the outside. Thus these developments destroy the land price of kampungs due to poor connectivity with their surroundings. Also Jakarta and many cities in Indonesia traditionally grow in a checkerboard pattern of real estate development, agricultural uses and rural villages as a result of what Firman refers to as “haphazard development.”(6) In Bahasa Indonesia, the city is always an *ibukota*, a mother its rural surrounding. However, the current insular development leads to a disconnection from both its rural surroundings as well as from other cities. This is reminiscent of the classic concept proposed by Clifford Geertz addressing the “social history” of the Javanese town in his book *Hollow Town*. He wrote:

...the town was more a loose collection of estate-like social groups than an integrated municipal unit. It was a composite of self-contained status communities whose real basis was regional and interurban, not local and intraurban, a collection of impermeable strata living, one might almost say, side by side, rather than a structure of inter-related classes engaged in continuous interaction. (Geertz, 1975, p. 4)(7)

However, this hollow town is not only in its size a town. Now it applies to the whole island of Java, and perhaps, to the entire nation in the near future. The cost of the making a beautiful city could be albeit intangible very high.

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Notes

- (1) Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1990. *Topophilia. A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 102.
- (2) The riot was regarded as the most terrible post-colonial urban experience ever. The event perhaps can only be compared with the bloody revolution against the communist movement in 1965. The riot was followed by

political turmoil, which pushed Suharto to step down. The ad hoc team was comprised from many elements (human rights commissions, non governmental organizations, the military) and concluded that the number of victims was impossible to determine. Voluntary movements recorded 1190 burned to death, 27 killed by bullets and 91 wounded. Police department records indicated 451 killed, military records indicated 463 killed, and urban authorities recorded 288 killed and 101 injured. Source: <http://www.semangipedul.com>.

(3) See Sorokin, M. 1992. *Variations on a Theme Park*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

(4) Peresthu reported such developments in Jakarta and surroundings, Some of the most prominent are Bumi Serpong Damai covering 6,000 hectares, Tigaraksa New Town covering 3,100 hectares, Lippo Village Karawaci covering 2,600 hectares, and Pantai Indah Kapuk with 800 hectares are mainly the result of land reclamation from Jakarta's off shore. Moreover to add the list, there are Alam Sutera (700 hectares), Kapuk Naga (8,000 hectares), Bintaro Jaya (2,300 hectares), Citra Raya New Town (2,000 hectares), Modernland (770 hectares), Citra Grand City (1,000 hectares), Villa Permata (700 hectares), Palm Spring Village 100, Pun Jaya City (2,000 hectares), Citraland New Town and Gading New Town. In Bekasi Regency: Bekasi Integrated New Town (1,300 hectares), Cikarang baru New Town (5,400 hectares), Bekasi 2000 New Town (2,000 hectares), Lippo Cikarang (5,000 hectares), Legend New City (2,000 hectares), Bekasi new City planned for (3,000 hectares), Bumi Bekasi baru New Town (1,500 hectares). In Bogor Regency Jonggol Asri is planned to cover 33,000 hectares, Citra Indah City (1,200 hectares), Royal Sentul New City (2,000 hectares), Lido Lake (1,700 hectares), Rancamaya New City (550 hectares), Cariu New City (2,000 hectares) Peresthu, Andrea. no year. “Jakarta’s “Exurbia” Kampongs.” ETSAB-UPC, Barcelona Research Paper available at www.etsav.upc.es/urbspersp.

(5) The survey was conducted under research entitled “Gated Communities: Studies on Spatial and Social Implications and the Prospect on Spatial Management with the case of Yogyakarta”. The research has been funded by the Ministry of Research and Technology for two years (2005-2006) under the program of Advanced Collaborative Research (Riset Unggulan Terpadu – RUT Batch XII) in which the author is the principal researcher. When this dissertation was written, the research was still in progress, hence, cannot be concluded yet.

(6) Firman, T. 2000. “Rural to Urban Land Conversion in Indonesia during Boom and Bust Periods.” *Land Use Policy* 17: 13-20.

(7) *Hollow Town* is proposed referring to a Mojokuto, a small town in East Java. He proposed the concept of a “hollow town” which contains four characteristics. (A) Social group is the basis of spatial division. Geertz saw that those “estate-like social groups” are composed by interrelation of religion, ideology, race, occupation, social and economic status etc. In the case of Mojokuto, pious Muslim santris are concentrated in a certain part of the town and is not mixed with its “opposition” namely abangan. The priyayi, aristocrats and state officers, are also agglomerated in certain area separates with traders (Chinese for instance). Those factions are clearly expressed in spatial division. (b) It is based on independent entities and the link between them. A village is an independent entity. It has its own social structure, has its own supply of basic commodities, as well as workforces. Exchange of commodities may also happen in the village. Inter-village relation happens mostly during the market day. The town is not only a collection of these entities albeit in the compressed form as Geertz described as “a composite of self-contained status communities” that their basis is regional and interurban and not local and intraurban. (c) The difference of strata living produces a barrier between groups. Although it may not always produce a social grouping and spatial division but the gap between the strata may be apprehended and may appear in certain limited interaction, “side by side and not in the solid structure.” Geertz, Clifford. 1965. *The Social History of an Indonesian Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 4).

