

## Introduction

In my paper I will sketch the emergence of planning the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) between 1905 and 1950. The rationale behind these periodic boundaries is of an administrative nature. Thanks to new legislation, from 1905 onwards cities and towns were no longer governed by the central government in Batavia (now Jakarta), but by local councils – or ‘municipalities’, as they were soon referred to. The later date marks the official transfer of sovereignty in December 1949; the Dutch from 1950 onwards no longer ruled the archipelago. To understand the context of these developments though, we need to go slightly further back in history.

When the Dutch arrived in the archipelago in the early seventeenth century, it was not the administrative entity as we know it today; instead it was a collection of Kingdoms – the traces of which remain to this very day. Through a mixture of trade and military force, more force than trade in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Dutch gradually explored and subjugated the archipelago until, in the early twentieth century when it achieved the dimensions of the country known today as Indonesia.

The South East Asian colony with its abundance of crops, minerals and workers, was an important asset for the Netherlands. To control and administer the expanding colony and its resources, the Dutch government increasingly felt the need to map the country and register traditional, indigenous land properties. To achieve this, a Land Surveying Service and a Land Registry were established in 1837 and 1873 respectively. As these institutes soon discovered though, their tasks were almost impossible as indigenous land property rights were unregistered, very different from and much more nuanced than Dutch/European land property rights. Indeed, the two institutes lacked the knowledge and means to properly register the extent and complexity of the Indonesian land property rights.

To warrant a ‘legally’ supported use and exploitation of land in the archipelago, the colonial government in Batavia formulated and enacted a number of laws during the second half of nineteenth century. The laws were dictated by economic and social considerations. They addressed the authorities and the duties of the government with regard to sales and long lease of land, prevented transfers of land that would harm indigenous land property rights – and consequently the socio-economic coherence of the indigenous society – but more importantly, they stipulated that any land for which ownership could not be proved became, by default, state property.

By regulating land property and tenure, and by establishing institutes to survey and register that land, the government created the necessary tools to direct the development of the colony. An approach that was far from superfluous considering the colony’s territorial expansion and the demographic, economic and spatial changes that occurred after 1870 when the government’s trade monopoly was abolished and Dutch and other European entrepreneurs settled in the Dutch East Indies.

## Planning the colony

It was the arrival of these entrepreneurs that fundamentally altered the character and outlook of the archipelago during the last colonial period. Unlike their compatriots who lived and worked in the colony prior to 1870, the entrepreneurs often arrived with the intention to stay rather than simply exploit and return to the motherland. One of the results of this different mind-set was that rather than striking up ‘friendships’ with Indonesian women, the majority of entrepreneurs brought along their European families facilitating more of a European lifestyle. Although Europeans were and remained an ethnic minority in the multiethnic archipelago, it was the concomitant socio-economic and spatial changes the Europeans brought about that persuaded local and central government, architects and planners to address the hitherto by and large ignored issues (related to) planning and housing.

Two ground breaking propagandists for planning and housing in the colony were in Semarang: GP W.Th. de Vogel and H.F. Tillema, a pharmacist, both local councillors. Alarmed by the lack of hygienic conditions in both the European and Indonesian neighbourhoods, De Vogel and particularly Tillema relentlessly lobbied politicians, planners, and architects in the Dutch East Indies, the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe in the 1900s and early 1910s. Their lobby was not just political rhetoric: as early

as 1907 De Vogel persuaded the Semarang council to purchase New Tjandi, a large, hilly private estate south of the existing city. Although the elite residential neighbourhood that was ultimately built on New Tjandi was a far cry from the social housing complex De Vogel and Tillema had initially envisioned, its origins were deeply rooted in De Vogel and Tillema's deeply held beliefs that urban development needed to be steered, planned and controlled. All that remains of the first design for New Tjandi are three undated sketches, a blue print and a road scheme designed by Dutch based architect K.P.C. de Bazel.

In 1916, the Dutch architect H.Th. Karsten designed the second, executed plan for New Tjandi. At the time of this commission, Karsten was 'chef de bureau' of the Semarang based architecture practice of his colleague and friend Henri Maclaine Pont. Contrary to the intentions of De Vogel and Tillema, Karsten designed New Tjandi for the Semarang's affluent rather than under-privileged inhabitants. What was also different was that Karsten designed New Tjandi as part of a wider, more elaborate extension plan, or rather extension plans, and that he collaborated with the Semarang Department of Public Works.

Karsten's 1916 extension plan for Semarang and its 1919 revision reflected Karsten's vision on planning. Instead of designing individual plans for individual neighbourhoods, Karsten recognised the need for a comprehensive plan that included various neighbourhoods and all their residents. By demarcating the different neighbourhoods along socio-economic rather than ethnic lines, the design illustrated Karsten's progressive and indeed radical outlook on Dutch East Indies society: a society where socio-economic rather than ethnic standards defined one's position.

In the framework of this particular session, it is interesting to note the central area of Karsten's 1916 and 1919 designs, known as Peterongan-Pekoenden. Unlike Karsten's design seems to suggest, the plan for Peterongan-Pekoenden was not commissioned by the Semarang council but by its original owners: Oei Tiong Ham and Be Kwat King. Anticipating that the Semarang council would eventually purchase or expropriate the estate, and bearing in mind that built-up land was more valuable than farm land, around 1916, Oei and Be commissioned Maclaine Pont's bureau – i.e. Karsten – to design a building scheme for their estate. As Karsten tuned this private commission carefully to the designs for the Semarang council, the plan for Peterongan-Pekoenden eventually, when the Semarang council purchased the estate in 1918, joined organically with Karsten's other extension plans for Semarang.

Although Karsten was not the first architect in the archipelago who considered an extension plan on a city rather than a neighbourhood level (Maclaine Pont did something similar in Surabaya in 1914), it was his plan for Semarang that instigated a fundamental change in planning and housing in the Dutch East Indies. From 1920 onwards, the initial haphazard and intuitive approach was gradually replaced by a rational and legally sustained approach. To a large degree the gradual professionalization and institutionalisation of Dutch East Indies planning and housing in the 1920s and 1930s mirrored similar developments in Europe and North-America, but it was not a slavish copy. For although Karsten supported CIAM's plea for more of a social orientation, clarity and functionality, he utterly disapproved of CIAM's modernist doctrine for high-rise, flat roofs, and steel furniture, and its rhetoric against aesthetics, tradition, and arcades in brickwork. Design principles that, according to Karsten and many of his Dutch East Indies colleagues were highly inappropriate in a non-Western context where almost all circumstances differed from those in the so-called developed world. For example, the incidence of light, the multiethnic character of the Dutch East Indies society, the looseness of the professional network, the level of mechanisation, the lack of statistical data, and land-ownership. All circumstances that individually challenged and forced the Dutch East Indies planners and architects to rethink and adjust Western design principles, let alone when confronted with the effects of their combination.

### Housing in the colony

An evocative example of the need to rethink and adjust Western models to local circumstances was public housing. Confronted with a dire housing shortage and grossly unhygienic conditions, the initial response of the officials was to prepare a Housing Act similar to the one passed in the Netherlands in 1901. When the draft for the Dutch East Indies Housing Act this act was presented however, the government in Batavia showed little faith in its effectiveness. Firstly, because the Department of Public Works suffered a chronic shortage of personnel and was therefore unable to implement the act to any great degree. Secondly because, considering that a substandard dwelling was still preferable to no dwelling at all, declaring houses uninhabitable proved undesirable and unwelcomed.

Although the refusal of the colonial government to enact the Housing Act was a disillusionment, it did not deter local officials, planners and architects to initiate housing projects for Europeans as well as for non-Europeans. In the final section of my paper I will discuss *kampung* projects – planning and housing projects aimed specifically at Indonesians – and the relation between these projects, planning, and politics.

Spurred on by the work of De Vogel and Tillema, the municipality of Batavia was one of the first local authorities to create an entirely new kampung for Indonesians. Initiated around 1913, kampung Taman Sari illustrates what happens when good intentions come up against ignorance. Designed to become a model for future kampung projects, Taman Sari was handled as if it was a European housing project: the municipality not only designed and constructed the lay-out and architecture of the neighbourhood, the five different types of dwellings, communal bathrooms and washing facilities, it also undertook their construction. Unfortunately, once the neighbourhood was ready, Indonesians turned out to be very reluctant to occupy the houses because the plan of the houses and probably the neighbourhood did not comply with Indonesian custom; a result of the lack of consultation and involvement of Indonesians in the design and construction process. The imposition of an unmediated European design ethos and this failure to consider traditional Indonesian culture resulted in Taman Sari's abandonment only four years after its conception.

Although Taman Sari was thus a complete failure, it did not stop municipalities from engaging in new kampung projects. Learning from the errors of previous undertakings, in 1920 the municipality of Medan adopted a radically different methodology and invited the kampung's future inhabitants to collaborate with the municipality; indeed, occasionally they even took the lead, albeit without total authority. After learning from the future inhabitants what the needs were, the Medan municipality subsequently provided them with the necessary construction materials resulting in houses that were relatively cheap and the inhabited by content residents – as they expressed by naming the first kampung 'Sidodadi', which means something like 'we succeeded'. This was a spectacular result considering the failure of Taman Sari just a few years previously.

Notwithstanding the success of Medan's participatory approach and despite the perseverance of councillors, planners and architects, the government refused to allocate further funds for kampung projects or create the legal framework for a systematic approach: a situation that only changed after communists revolts in 1926 and 1927 that were a demonstration of the frustration and anger of a considerable and growing number of Indonesians. Instrumental in the government's turn was a speech for the People's Council in 1928, of which the following is an expert:

*'May that segment of the population which inhabits the town kampongs still live in muffled resignation, unconsciously convinced that it cannot be any other way, one should not forget what a rewarding field it is to work with such a population for those who set themselves the goal of overthrowing the authority which allows such situations to continue without intervening. It is no coincidence, Mister Chairman, that a number of leaders are not at all enthusiastic about the kampung improvements. As long as political power is not obtained they prefer to allow the poor situation to continue; there is no better thinkable means of propaganda. Up until now the kampung population has remained quiet but the source of unrest, the perpetual threat to peace and order remains in the so badly neglected kampongs.'*

Not long after this speech, in 1929 the government approved a resolution declaring municipalities were to be eligible for a subsidy of maximum fifty per cent for kampung improvement projects provided the application was supported by an approved improvement plan. Unfortunately though, the victory was short-lived due to the worldwide economic crises that gulfed the world after 1929. Within three months of its enactment, the government reduced the budget the legislation had promised.

After the economy recovered around the mid 1930s, the government appointed a Kampung Committee to evaluate the previous ten years of kampung improvement and to present recommendations for the future. Notwithstanding the limited means that had been available to the municipalities, the Committee reported a fairly positive analysis of the various municipalities' achievements. In order to cover more ground and to exert greater control of expenditures though, the Committee recommended and defined a set of standardised improvements. Being restricted to the improvement of roads and gutters – a policy that continues to this day – kampung improvement

projects by the late 1930s were a fairly poor rendering from the initial ambitions of De Vogel, Tillema and the municipalities of Batavia and Medan.

Compared to the institutionalisation of kampung improvements, the institutionalisation of town planning adopted a far less restrictive approach. By 1938, a Town Planning Committee appointed by the government a few years earlier, presented a draft for a Town Planning Ordinance and memorandum. The Ordinance was ground breaking for the colony and for the Netherlands where, apart from the Housing Act of 1901, planning lacked legal corroboration. Unfortunately, the timing could not have been worse with the outbreak of World War II in 1939 and the subsequent Japanese occupation of the archipelago in 1942 preventing the formulization of Dutch East Indies town planning for more than a decade.

After the war ended and Indonesians proclaimed their independence, which was not formally acknowledged by the Netherlands until December 1949, the political situation in the archipelago became increasingly complex and evermore sensitive. Although the Dutch maintained control over the larger part of the archipelago and planners, architects, and officials resumed their work in the areas, the Republic of Indonesia also controlled important areas, notably in Central Java. To ensure the work of planners, architects and local councils was legally protected, the government passed the Town Planning Ordinance in 1948. An important and longstanding achievement that remained in force until its replacement by a new Law on Planning implemented in 1992. A more direct trajectory linking Indonesian planning and housing to Indonesia's colonial past is hardly conceivable.