# Designing colonial cities: the making of modern town planning in the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia 1905-1950

Far-reaching socio-economic changes caused by burgeoning private enterprise, in combination with new insights and demands in terms of hygiene, infrastructure, architecture and town planning; emerging anti-sentiments among growing numbers of indigenous inhabitants; and the direct confrontation of administrators with local issues: together these provided a prolific setting for the making of modern town planning in the Dutch East Indies in the first half of the twentieth century.

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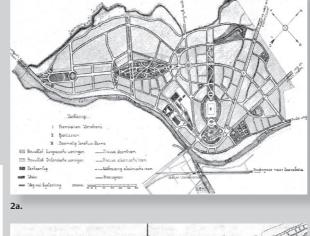
## Before 1905

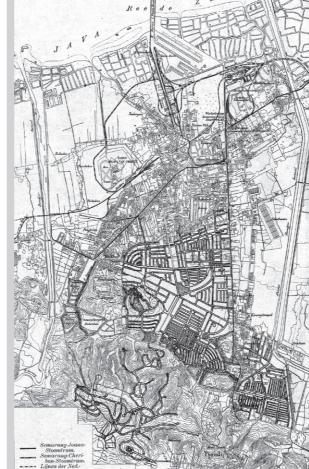
After nearly three centuries of Dutch domination, the Dutch East Indies – the archipelago that is today called Indonesia – underwent two major changes around the turn of the twentieth century. The first change was the introduction of the Agrarian Act (*Agrarische Wet*) in 1870. This act enabled private individuals to possess land on a long lease and, as a result, opened up business opportunities. The second change was the enactment of the Decentralisation Act (*Decentralisatiewet*) in 1903 and the Local Council Ordinance (*Locale Radenordonnantie*) in 1905. These two acts enabled the government to decentralise the archipelago's administration to local administrative entities –soon referred to as municipalities.

The introduction of the Agrarian Act fundamentally changed the outlook of the colony and its society. Prior to the enactment of the Agrarian Act it was predominantly male Dutch civil servants who set off to the Dutch East Indies. Following the Agrarian Act increasing numbers of businessmen, other professionals, and their wives headed to the archipelago from the Netherlands and other European countries. Consequently, as the Dutch/European Indian community became more diverse in terms of profession, gender and nationality, the Dutch Indian community increasingly became a multicultural version of Dutch/European society in Europe.

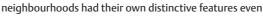
Given the need to address these rapid socio-economic and demographic changes, the decision to delegate the administration from the central government to local municipalities appeared to be a prudent one. In reality, however, decentralisation was anything but easy – as the municipalities soon discovered. The most important obstacle was that the government had left the municipalities severely under-resourced. Consequently, they lacked almost everything: sufficient administrative authority, annual budget, experience, knowledge, labour and materials. A serious handicap from a town planning perspective was that the maintenance of public works –formerly the shared responsibility of the Department of Public Works (*Burgerlijke Openbare Werken*) and Home Affairs (*Binnenlandsch Bestuur*) –



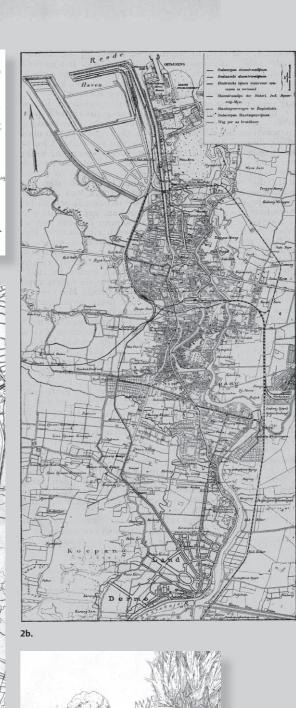




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3a.





modern town planning in Europe at the time: the principle

1: Batavia: bird's-eye sketch of *kampung* Taman Sari (1913). Design: Batavia Municipality.

2a: Surabaya: existing town with projection of Darmo (1914). Design: Bureau Maclaine Pont/ H. Maclaine Pont.

2b: Surabaya: building scheme Darmo (1914). Design: Bureau Maclaine Pont/ H. Maclaine Pont

3a: Semarang: town plan with projection of new neighbourhoods plans (1916). Design: Bureau Maclaine Pont/ H.Th. Karsten and Semarang Department for Public Works (Dienst Gemeentewerken)/ir A. Plate.

3b: Semarang: De Vogelplein in New Tjandi (1916). Design: Bureau Maclaine Pont/ H.Th. Karsten and Semarang Department for Public Works (Dienst Gemeentewerken)/ir A. Plate. was long overdue in many instances. When the municipalities approached the government to discuss matters or to ask for input, the response was generally dismissive.

Convinced that it was more efficient to tackle these setbacks collectively than individually, the municipalities established the Association for Local Interests (*Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen - VLB*) in 1912. The VLB, its journal *Local Interests* (*Locale Belangen*), and its annual Decentralisation Congress offered professionals, including architects and town planners, useful and necessary platforms to exchange expertise and knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Several congresses and in particular several preliminary advisories written at the request of the congress organising committees, were instrumental in the emergence, rationalisation, professionalisation and institutionalisation of modern town planning in the Dutch East Indies.

#### The emergence of town planning

As was customary in all European colonies around the world, Dutch Indian society was ethnically diverse and very class-conscious: by and large, Europeans, Indo-Europeans, Indonesians and other Asians socialised and lived in different social groups. Consequently, social groups and though the borders of the various ethnic groups were in many ways permeable in order to 'allow the mutual penetration of races [...] everywhere the demands of life demanded individuals to mingle'.<sup>2</sup>

In general, neighbourhoods for Europeans, Indo-Europeans, well-to-do Chinese and indigenous dignitaries were vast and moderately to sparsely populated. The parcels of land were relatively large, the houses luxurious and the gardens lush. The overall atmosphere was European. Middle class Asians, Indonesians and Indo-Europeans lived in considerably denser populated areas where the streets were narrower, sometimes unpaved, and the houses smaller and often combined with shops. The atmosphere in neighbourhoods was either indigenous, Chinese, British-Indian or Arab. The predominantly indigenous areas at the lower end of the socio-economic scale were the *kampungs*: densely populated and often unplanned, semi-permanent, predominantly indigenous settlements where facilities such as running water, baths, and toilets were often public.

The socio-economic division within ethnic neighbourhoods largely coincided with the rationale that characterised

of zoning; or in other words the division of a town plan into neighbourhoods based on socio-economic strata. The situation in the Dutch colony was complicated, however, due to administrative and financial constraints which meant that administrators and architects were not at liberty to interfere in *kampungs* because they were governed by an autonomous indigenous administration. The consequence was that, initially, admin-istrators and architects/planners could only address the needs of the non-Indonesian neighbourhoods.

The first newly-developed residential areas in the archipelago, Menteng-Nieuw Gondangdia in Batavia (1910) planned by P.A.J. Moojen and others, is illustrative of this approach. The plan, though clearly designed with notions of planning in terms of vistas, is basically a street plan bordered by plots of land destined for housing and some open, public spaces. What the designers seem to have overlooked, though, was how the new neighbourhood connected to the existing town and how it would affect future developments of Batavia. To circumvent the municipality's administrative limitation with regard to *kampungs*, Batavia resorted to the construction of

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# Designing colonial cities

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Taman Sari (1913), a new *kampung* designed to be a model for well planned indigenous neighbourhoods with good houses and public hygiene facilities. Unfortunately though, its designers again overlooked two important aspects: the social and cultural requirements with regard to, for example, the spatial and hierarchical layout of the area and the individual houses (the 'plan'), and the tradition of communal construction of dwellings (see illustration 1). As a result, particularly of the first omission, the *kampung*'s anticipated inhabitants did not move into the houses and in 1917 the Batavia municipality decided to demolish Taman Sari.

Despite their shortcomings, both plans were well intended attempts to address an urgent issue in the colony: the need for qualitatively and quantitatively sufficient housing. Instrumental in creating awareness about this issue and in stimulating municipalities to improve housing conditions in general and in *kampungs* in particular, were the pleas from medical specialists, notably W.T. de Vogel and H.F. Tillema from Semarang. The initial necessity to eliminate bad housing as a breeding ground for ill-health and epidemics (and, later on, as fertile soil for nationalists hoping to create political unrest) finally stimulated the government to promulgate directives that laid the foundations for coherent town planning in the late 1920s.

This was not yet the situation, however, in the first decade of the twentieth century. Almost immediately after the municipalities were established the Dutch Indian government, following the approach in the Netherlands where the housing situation was little better, agreed to draw up a Housing Act. A decade later, when the draft for this act was presented in 1916, the government decided not to decree it. The reason for this unexpected turn of events was that H.A. Kindermann, the then sitting advisor for decentralisation, was of the opinion that, rather than implementing a Housing Act that would stipulate the demolition of the majority of the existing housing stock without offering a substitute, it would be more realistic and effective to adjust existing building regulations and design coherent town plans.

Kindermann's approach was supported wholeheartedly by many architects and administrators, but it was difficult to achieve because of the many administrative, financial, legal and technical limitations. With the Housing Act abolished, ten years into the Decentralisation administrators and architects were still without any administrative, financial, legal or practical tools to address the housing and planning problems in major and minor towns throughout the archipelago. Thus, although architects and town planners had no choice but to continue their work rather haphazardly and by trial and error, in the second half of the 1910s town plans became increasingly comprehensive and visionary. Darmo in Surabaya (1914), New Candi and adjacent areas in Semarang (1916, revised 1919) and the northern extension plan for Bandung (1919) are all examples of this second phase in Dutch Indian town planning (see illustrations 2a and 2b, 3a and 3b, and 4).

What distinguishes Henri Maclaine Pont's Darmo plan from Moojen's Menteng plan is that Darmo is clearly divided into a European and an indigenous area and is appropriately linked to the existing town and harbour –i.e. the workplaces – by roads, a steam- and an electric tramway. Thomas Karsten's plan for Semarang and the plan for Bandung North by the General Engineers and Architectural Bureau (*Algemeen Ingenieurs- en Architectenbureau* - AIA) demonstrate an even more coherent approach. These plans no longer focus on a single, isolated neighbourhood but instead encompass various new neighbourhoods and, in fact, due to their Consequently, his text 'Town planning in the Dutch Indies' ('*Stedenbouw in Indië*'), although published in a newspaper at the time of the congress, more or less sank into oblivion.<sup>3</sup> Karsten's text, on the other hand, was presented and discussed at length during the congress and won much acclaim among colleagues and administrators in the colony as well as in the Netherlands.<sup>4</sup> 'Dutch Indian Town Planning' ('*Indiese Stedebouw*'), a concise yet comprehensive description of Karsten's ideas and suggestions about town planning, offered what administrators and colleagues had spent years waiting for: a handbook on town planning in general and in the Dutch East Indies in particular. With hindsight, one can see how this work laid the foundations for Karsten's career and reputation as the colony's town planning theorist and designer.<sup>5</sup>

The relevance of 'Dutch Indian Town Planning' in terms of the professionalisation of town planning in the archipelago notwithstanding, it was two governmental resolutions from the second half of the 1920s that ultimately institutionalized the colony's town planning practice. The first resolution, from 1926, granted priority rights on land to municipalities over third parties if they were able to substantiate the indispensability of the land for a sound and coherent development of the town, based on a sufficiently detailed town plan approved by the local and central governments. The second resolution, from 1929, stated that municipalities were eligible for a subsidy of up to fifty percent for kampung improvement projects, provided the application was supported by an approved improvement plan. As the administrative autonomy of the kampungs had been lifted some ten years earlier, these two resolutions finally gave administrators and town planners the space and the financials means they had been pleading for since decentralisation was introduced.

The 1926 regulation was precisely what the municipality of Malang needed to undo the recent acquisition of a large plot of land by a private entrepreneur - an acquisition that would have severely obstructed the future extension of Malang in a northwest direction. Subsequently, Karsten was invited to design the town plan that was to endorse the municipality's request for priority rights over this land. After the government rejected the request and the plan, citing a lack of sufficient detail, Karsten reworked the design and presented it again in 1933 and in 1935. The 1933 plan was a meticulously elaborated version of the 1929 version (see illustration 5). The 1935 plan, though different in scale, ideologically resembled Karsten's extension plan for Bogor (Buitenzorg) (1917). It aimed to prepare the town and its immediate surroundings for long-term future developments, and thus anticipated and provided for regional developments.

As statistics and socio-cultural understanding increased and improved from the 1930s onwards, regional planning and 'planology'–a highly rational, 'scientific' form of planning supported by Karsten–won ground. The resulting rationalisation of the planning practice enabled architects to design town plans that complied better with the market and were less intuitive in style than in the early days. Although many designers supported the trend towards rationalisation and supra-local planning, regional planning in the archipelago only really took off after 1945. Postwar examples of regional planning include the plans designed in 1948 by the (Central) Planning Bureau for north Celebes and the region southeast of Bogor.

### The institutionalisation of town planning

With the pragmatic side of the town planning practice more or less in place, there was only one more issue that needed to be addressed: a legal framework. In order to realize this, the government appointed a Town Planning Committee (Stadvormingscommissie) in 1934. The committee's task was to study the full extent of town planning and draw up one suitable regulation to replace the 1926 stipulation. The committee, a combination of administrators, civil servants, lawyers and architects, presented the findings of its work in 1938 in the form of a draft for a Town Planning Ordinance (Stadsvormingsordonnantie - SVO) for municipalities in Java and an explanation to this ordinance. Sadly, the timing of the presentation of the Town Planning Ordinance was rather unfortunate. The outbreak of World War II in 1939 and the Japanese occupation of the archipelago in 1942 postponed its enactment until a later date.

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towns Medan, Padang and Palembang and the islands of Kalimantan (*Borneo*), Sulawesi (*Celebes*), Moluccas and New Guinea. The CPB focused on several areas in particular: the capital Batavia, and economically vital towns on Kalimantan and Sulawesi that were heavily damaged by hostile and allied attacks due to their relevance for the oil industry. Ironically, it was the need for a legal framework to execute the reconstruction plans of these towns in East Indonesia that led to the Town Planning Ordinance finally being decreed in August 1948.<sup>7</sup>

Backed by the Town Planning Ordinance, the CPB was able to manoeuvre. The first plan designed under the auspices of the bureau was Kebayoran Baru, a satellite town to the south of Batavia (see illustration 6). Designed to fill the dire need for houses in the capital, the new town epitomised the expansion and rationalisation of prewar town planning. Not only was the design for Kebajoran Baru the first plan to organise a new town, it was also the first plan to outline the various functional and socio-economic zones (dwelling, work, leisure, green). In East Indonesia, the CPB took this rationalisation one step further and implemented the so-called 'survey before plan' approach, which had been introduced in the 1930s but had never been fully implemented in the archipelago due to a lack of statistics. Based on this approach, where a wide variety of data about existing and possible future conditions was collected and analysed prior to the design process, the CPB planners were able to design plans for Banjermasin, Balikpapan (1949) and Samarinda (1950), and a regional plan for North Sulawesi. Particularly the latter not only provided a reconstruction of the heavily damaged towns, but also improved awkward prewar situations and anticipated future (regional) developments (see illustration 7).

The rational, but particularly the supra-local approach of the post World War II plans indicated a new direction in town planning, or rather, spatial planning. Unlike the period before 1942, this time the government acted promptly. In 1948, only three months after the Town Planning Ordinance was decreed, it appointed a committee to prepare an act on regional planning in non-urban areas. The committee, chaired by the engineer Jac. P. Thijsse who also headed the CPB, met several times and in 1951 presented a draft of the Spatial Planning Act (Wetsontwerp op de Ruimtelijke Ordening). Again, the timing was poor, as the Netherlands had transferred sovereignty to Indonesia by the end of 1949 and, subsequently, by then all Dutch professionals in leading positions had been replaced by Indonesians. History repeated itself: the draft was presented to the minister of the Department of Public Works and Energy (Departemen Pekerjaan Umum dan Tenaga) but was never decreed. Although an official

4: Bandung: sketch extension plan Bandung North (1917). Design: Algemeen Ingenieurs- en Architectenbureau/ F.J.L. Ghijsels.



vastness, almost the entire town; a trend that eventually led to the introduction of regional planning.

### The rationalisation and professionalisation of town planning

The changing approach to designing town plans followed and reflected the changes and development of Dutch Indian society and the gradually accumulated knowledge of architects and town planners. What was still lacking by the end of the 1910s, however, was the vision and tools to address town planning systematically.

In an attempt to fill this gap, the Association for Local Interests invited the architects Karsten and Maclaine Pont to write preliminary advisories about town planning in the Dutch East Indies for the 1920 Decentralisation Congress. Maclaine Pont and Karsten, both of whom had graduated from the Polytechnic in Delft, had moved independently to the Dutch East Indies in the early 1910s and by a process of trial and error each had amassed knowledge about life and work in the colony. Given that it would have been interesting to be able to compare the no doubt different visions of both men, it is unfortunate that, due to ill health, Maclaine Pont was unable to finish and present his contribution to the congress.

After the war, the infrastructure of town planning practice was fundamentally reorganised. As only a small number of professionals were still around – many, among them Karsten, died in the internment camps or had left the archipelago – it was decided to consolidate all expertise in a central organisation, the (Central) Planning Bureau ((C)PB) in Batavia. The bureau's main task was to survey war damage and to design and coordinate the execution of reconstruction plans in towns and regions under Dutch control.<sup>6</sup> On Java this meant the strip of land between Batavia and Bandung; on Sumatra, the reason was never given, Thijsse gave two plausible reasons why the act never gained legal force. The first reason was that the draft was written in Dutch and those responsible did not have enough understanding of Dutch to translate the text. The second reason was the unremitting lack of qualitative and quantitative personnel to guarantee the implementation of the act. To sidestep this problem, it was easiest to refrain from assessing the act – and thus the obligation to execute and observe it.

The decision not to decree the Spatial Planning Act was unsatisfactory from both a methodological and a historical point of view. By not decreeing the act, the government obstructed the legal and methodological expansion of town planning into the vaster realm of spatial planning. It also discontinued the ongoing professionalisation and adaptation of town planning as an autonomous discipline –a development that had begun in 1905 and, so far, had only been interrupted between 1942 and 1945. The absence of a Spatial Planning Act meant that the predominantly prewar Town Planning Act prevailed until, finally, in 1992, it was replaced by an Indonesian Act on Spatial Planning (*Undang-undang 24 Penataan Ruang*), and finally in 2007 by a completely revised act (*Undang-undang 26 Penataan Ruang*).

## After 1950<sup>8</sup>

Although the postponement of the assessment of the Spatial Planning Act was a direct result of the Indonesianisation of administrative and other institutions –i.e. the replacement of Dutch professionals in leading positions by Indonesians –that followed the 1949 transfer of sovereignty from the Netherlands to the Republic of Indonesia, it was not symptomatic of town planning, or indeed architecture practice in the new republic. As Indonesia (still) offered good career opportunities, many Dutch professionals resumed and even began their careers in the republic in the 1950s. It was not until 1957, when Indonesia flexed its muscles regarding the status of New Guinea and diplomatic relations came to an abrupt halt, that all Dutch professionals, including architects and town planners, left the country and the outlook on town planning and architecture gradually started to change.



## To eliminate

bad housing as a breeding ground for ill-health and epidemics (and, later on, as fertile soil for nationalists hoping to create political unrest), the government promulgated directives that laid

the foundations for coherent town planning in the late 1920s. Vacant teaching and other positions in the field of architecture and town planning were almost instantly filled by colleagues from the US, Austria and Germany. Consultancy and teaching by architects and town planners from Harvard and Kentucky, together with scholarships that enabled Indonesian students to study in the US, gradually led to a more American design approach being adopted in the archipelago.

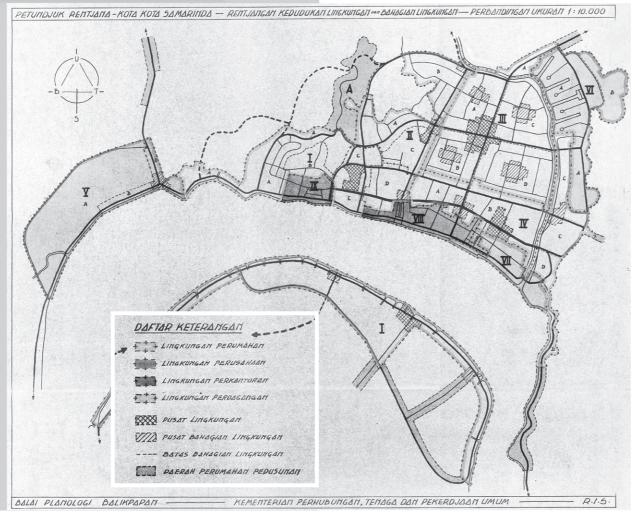
The new approach was not so much a shift in methodology as it was a shift in focus. Contrary to the relatively smallscale neighbourhoods and towns designed by Dutch town planners, American town planners designed vast towns with dense business centres linked to vast, quiet and green residential suburbs by long, wide traffic routes. The new approach fostered town plans and architecture in which transportation by car instead of on foot or by bicycle was the norm, as were high-rises and air-conditioning. Norms so fundamentally different from the earlier Dutch /European approach that it was this rather than the transfer of sovereignty that ultimately altered the outlook of late colonial towns in the archipelago.

### Conclusion

Town planning is not a purely utilitarian, social and/or aesthetic profession. This justifies the question, particularly in a colonial context, whether (and, if so, to what extent) town plans aimed at emphasizing or confirming Dutch dominance over the archipelago?

Based on my research, I see no evidence to support an affirmative answer to this question. Although there is some evidence of nuance – the government's 1929 decision to subsidise *kampung* improvement projects was prompted as much by concerns about hygiene as it was by concerns over simmering political unrest – the sources analysed bear witness to a professional and pragmatic approach towards town planning: the objective was to design functional and aesthetic town plans for Europeans, Indonesians and other Asians. Although this does not deny that there may have been town planners who (wholeheartedly) supported the colonial system, I have found no evidence or indications that town plans were designed with this intention in mind.

The only plan that could be considered a demonstration of colonial aspirations was the plan for north Bandung. Born out of the ambition of Governor-General Count J.P. van Limburg Stirum to transform Bandung into the colony's new representative administrative capital, the development of the plan also illustrates the ambivalent position of both the Dutch Indian government and town planners. Caught between visionary considerations on the one hand and pragmatic ones on the other, the plan was only partially executed and, in fact, was abandoned only a couple of years after its conception. Consequently, until this day Bandung has the dubious honour of being the embodiment of grand aspirations but deficient circumstances.



Rather than arguing that Dutch Indian town planning is an expression of colonial power, I would argue that Dutch Indian town planning was, in fact, an autonomous discipline –after the Dutch transfer of sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia, it continued along the same lines. Had the Dutch Indian approach to town planning not been autonomous but colonial, post-colonial town planners would surely–if not immediately, then at least after some time –have abandoned it. As this did not happen, one can safely assert that Dutch Indian town planning was not a tool of the colonial politics of the Dutch Indian government but an autonomous discipline.

Another aspect that comes through in this study is the gradual emancipation of non-European inhabitants and professionals. Although their number never equalled the number of Europeans, the involvement of non-European architects, town planners and administrators in administration and town planning gradually increased and undoubtedly changed perspectives. During the Dutch period, people such as Abdoelrachman, R. Abikoesno, R. Slamet, R.Ng. Soebroto, Moh. Soesilo, Soetoto and Moh. Hoesni Thamrin were influential. After all the Dutch professionals left in 1957, important town plans were designed by Lucius O'Brien, R.S. Danunagoro, Herbowo, Kandar Tisnawinata and Radinal Moochtar. These were the architects and town planners who heralded a new era: an era in which Indonesian town plans were designed by Indonesian town planners.

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#### Notes

- 1 By the beginning of the 20th century, architects and engineers were already associated. A Dutch Indian section of the Royal Institute for Engineers (Koninklijk Instituut voor Ingenieurs - KIVI) was established in 1850. In 1898 the Association of Architects in the Dutch East Indies (Vereeniging van Bouwkundigen in Nederlandsch-Indië) was established. Both associations published their own journal. The engineers' journal was successively published under the following names: The Journal of KIVI, section Dutch East Indies (Het Tijdschrift van het KIVI, afdeling Nederlands-Indië), The Engineer (De Ingenieur) and The Engineer in the Dutch East Indies (De Ingenieur in Nederlandsch-Indië). The architects' periodical was called: Dutch Indian Architecture Journal (Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift). After Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift merged with Locale Techniek in 1934, it was renamed IBT/Locale Techniek. From 1938 until its last issue in 1942 is was called Locale Techniek/IBT.
- 2 'laisser le chemin libre pour l'interpénétration des races dans les villes partout où les besoins de la vie exigent que les individus se mêlent.' Cohen, A.B., Hébard, Stuart E. and Durand, Emm. (1932). 'A propos de la séparation des villes au Maroc et aux Indes Néerlandaises', in: Jean Royer, *L'Urbanisme aux colonies et dans les pays tropicaux, Tome I*, Délayance Editeur, La Charité-sur-Loire. 276-277, 276.
- 3 Maclaine Pont, H. (1920). 'Stedenbouw in Indië I', *Java-Bode* 107 (8-5-1920), s.p.; Maclaine Pont, H. (1920). 'Stedenbouw in Indië II', *Java-Bode* 109 (11-5-1920), s.p.; Maclaine Pont, H. (1920). 'De Bandoengsche uitbreidingsplannen I', *Preangerbode* 142 (22-5-1920), s.p.; Maclaine Pont, H. (1920). 'De Bandoengsche uitbreidingsplannen II', *Preangerbode* 145 (27-5-1920), s.p.
- 4 Karsten, Thomas. (1920). 'Indiese stedebouw', *Locale Belangen Mededeeling* 40, 145-250.
- 5 Although in many ways Karsten dominated the town planning practice in the Dutch East Indies, the emergence of town planning can not be solely attributed to him. Many

others, for example directors of municipal departments of public works (ir H. Heetjans in Bandung, ir J.J.G.E. Rückert in Semarang), mayors (ir D. de longh in Semarang, E.A. Voorneman in Malang, F.H. van de Wetering in Menado and Palembang), and central governmental officials (mr A.B. Cohen Stuart) also made valuable contributions to the emergence, professionalisation and institutionalisation of Dutch Indian town planning.

- 6 Two days after Japan surrendered, Indonesia proclaimed its independence from the Netherlands. As the Netherlands refused to acknowledge its former colony's independence, Indonesia and the Netherlands became involved in a threeyear colonial war. Under international pressure the Netherlands transferred sovereignty to Indonesia in December 1949.
  7 In order to apply the Town Planning Ordinance to these towns, a minor but essential revision was made to the prewar draft: the condition that the ordinance applied to municipalities on Java was replaced by the condition that the Town Planning Ordinance was applicable to all towns, with or without municipal status, throughout the archipelago.
- 8 Although developments after 1950 fall outside my core research, it is useful to describe them briefly in order to comprehend Indonesian town planning today.

7: Samarinda: town plan with rearranged neighbourhoods (1950). Design: (Central) Planning Bureau/ H. Lüning.