

An Ineffective Shot across
the Bows

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BANDUNG → 140

The analysis of Bandung was conducted by a team of Dutch professionals in the Dutch East Indies, led by town planner, Thomas Karsten. [1] None of the team was ever a member of CIAM or attended the fourth congress. Their connection to CIAM was rather loose. Unlike Dalat in Indochina, Bandung was not just a 'recreational city'; from the 1910s onward, it was the Dutch East Indies' administrative and scientific capital.



1 Karsten and his wife, 1930

Thomas Karsten

Probably sometime during January 1932, Bandung-based, Dutch-born architect and planner Karsten received a letter from his nephew in Amsterdam, architect Charles Karsten.¹ In his letter, Charles – a member of the Dutch architectural group 'de 8' and part of the team coordinating CIAM 4 – invited his uncle to prepare a Dutch East Indian entry for the meeting.

Charles's letter to Karsten – who was the archipelago's leading town planner at the time – seems to have been somewhat of a surprise to Karsten. Not only because on a personal and professional level Karsten's relationship with his nephew does not seem to have been very close, but also because professional contact between architects and planners in the Netherlands and its Asian colony was rather limited. Given the latter however, it could very well have been this circumstance that caused Charles to write to his uncle, for Karsten was not only an acknowledged professional in the colony but also, since he was a relative, probably rather easy to contact.

Very early on in his career, Karsten gained a reputation as town planner. In 1916, only two years after his arrival in the Dutch East Indies, he designed a comprehensive Extension Plan for Semarang.² [2] In the following year he single-handedly designed an extension plan for Buitenzorg (now Bogor). Although these designs were hailed by Dutch East Indian colleagues, it was his treatise *Indiese Stedebouw* (Indish Town Planning, 1920), the first dedicated publication about Dutch East Indian town planning, that laid the foundation for Karsten's reputation as town planner and theorist.³ Between 1914 and 1931 he worked and lived in Semarang before he moved to Bandung in 1931.

Karsten, though honoured with the invitation, was initially rather ill-informed about the CIAM.⁴ After having familiarized himself with the CIAM's principles and objectives, he observed important



2 Semarang, Extension Plan, Karsten, 1916

parallels between the CIAM and his own work. Particularly the CIAM's plea for social orientation, clarity and functional town planning resonated with him. However, he deeply disapproved of the CIAM's plea to eliminate aesthetic and traditional considerations; two elements that Karsten, out of personal preference and for socioeconomic and cultural reasons thought to be of the utmost importance. For him, aesthetics was an essential aspect of

1 To avoid confusion and to simplify matters, if Karsten is mentioned solely, it refers to Thomas Karsten. Charles Karsten will always be mentioned with his first and family name.
2 The 1916 Extension Plan for Semarang was designed in close collaboration with August Plate from Semarang's municipal Department of Public Works. August Plate, 'Het uitbreidingsplan der Indische Gemeenten', in: *De Ingenieur* vol. 16 (1918), 274–297; August Plate, 'Het uitbreidingsplan der gemeente Semarang', in: *De Ingenieur* vol. 22 (1918), 408.
3 Despite a highly favourable review in a Dutch journal by professor Marinus Jan Granpré Molière, one of Karsten's lecturers and friends from Delft, *Indiese Stedebouw* was virtually ignored by colleagues in the Netherlands. Marinus Jan Granpré Molière, 'Indiese stedebouw door Ir. Th. Karsten', in: *Tijdschrift voor Volkshuisvesting* vol. 9 (1922), 226–234.
4 Information in the next two paragraphs is derived from the following letters: T. Karsten, letter to Ch. Karsten, 27.03.1932 and 19.04.1932; Ch. Karsten, letter to T. Karsten, 22.09.1932, Karsten Family archive (KFA).



3 Karsten, office of the Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij, Semarang, 1930

life and design – and it distinguished architects from engineers. According to Karsten, tradition was also important because it offered designers, in a colonial context, an effective distinguishing tool vis-à-vis foreign cultural domination. [3] Other elements of the CIAM doctrine Karsten criticized were its plea for high-rise buildings, flat roofs, steel furniture and the elimination of arcades in brickwork. In Karsten's opinion, these aspects were climatically and financially inappropriate for the Dutch East Indies.

Acknowledging that the congress would be instructive for him and his Dutch East Indian colleagues, since the West was clearly leading in terms of the methodology of town planning, Karsten questioned what the value would be of an analysis of a Dutch East Indian city in the predominantly Western-oriented CIAM. A question prompted by the fact that the CIAM's guidelines for the analyses did not allow for any local information about, for example, the level of mechanization, the absence of statistical data, the flexibility of the professional network, the rationale behind the differing social housing standards, the incidence of light, and the impact of the ethnic neighbourhoods in the colony. Such information, according to Karsten, was of the utmost importance for a predominantly Western audience to understand the local circumstances and assess the value of the presented plan. Without this information, presenting any Dutch East Indian town plan to a Western audience would merely be 'an ineffective shot across the bows'.⁵

Next, Karsten narrowed his critique to question the organization's decision to invite just one Dutch East Indian city without any background information, and then for that choice to be Bandung. It was no surprise that he also suggested presenting Semarang's town plan. As the principal designer of Semarang's 1916 Extension Plan, Karsten knew the city and its data very well. Consequently, for Karsten to make an analysis would have been relatively easy. Moreover, if Semarang rather than Bandung was presented – the latter being developed along the lines of an extension plan designed by the General Engineers and Architecture Bureau (Algemeen Ingenieurs en Architectenbureau, AIA), Karsten would not only be noticed as a theoretician, but also as a practising town planner.

The CIAM's request to Karsten, some time later, to send a set of maps of Semarang seems to suggest that the CIAM adopted his idea to present a second analysis in addition to the analysis of Bandung. However, for reasons unknown today, an analysis of Semarang was not presented.⁶ A possible reason for not including Semarang

could be that Karsten did not succeed in engaging the right person in Semarang to prepare the analysis. This would seem to confirm his remark that the professional networks in the Dutch East Indies lacked coherence and would support my hypothesis that Bandung's participation at the CIAM 4 was probably prompted as much by ideological and professional considerations as it was by pragmatic ones.

Bandung

The city of Bandung that was presented at the exhibition was the result of a visionary, yet unfulfilled aspiration from the 1910s – to transform a rather nondescript regent and garrison town into the archipelago's administrative and scientific capital.⁷ This ambitious plan was initiated by Governor-General Count Johan Paul van Limburg Stirum, who aimed for a complete relocation of the colony's administrative departments that for functional reasons did not need to be accommodated in the notoriously unhealthy capital Batavia (now Jakarta), to the inland town of Bandung. When almost simultaneously, the idea to establish a branch of the Delft Polytechnic School in the colony emerged, it was soon decided that Bandung would also be the Dutch East Indies' scientific capital.

Situated in a vast caldera just over 700 m above sea level, Bandung offered apparent advantages over Batavia. It was cooler – thus healthier, there was an abundance of vacant land and good soil north of the existing town, and the town and its surroundings were very picturesque: the river Cikapundung running north-south, the ring of mountains surrounding the town and the volcanoes Tangkuban Perahu to the north and Papandayan to the south. In terms of



4 Bandung, Extension Plan, General Engineers and Architecture Bureau, 1917

infrastructure Bandung was very well connected to Java's major towns (Batavia, Yogyakarta, Solo, Semarang and Surabaya) by the trans-Java road (Groote Postweg) and railway. The original indigenous Bandung was built around a traditional Javanese square (*alun-alun*) and situated south of the trans-Java road and railway tracks. The Dutch garrisons were situated to the traditional city's northeast.

Van Limburg Stirum's decision to develop Bandung accelerated the execution of its land policy as formulated by H. Heetjans in 1915. In line with Heetjans's guiding principles, the Batavia-based AIA Bureau designed an extension plan north of the national road and railway that almost quintupled Bandung's built up area. [4] There were two factors that determined this location. First of all, the soil conditions north of the existing town were very good. Secondly, the plots of land north of the town were vast and virtually bare, and – very important from an aesthetic town planning point of view – undulating and hilly.⁸ By skilfully exploiting the natural and geological features of Bandung and its environment AIA designed a grand plan. A plan that – despite some changes and the fact that it was never fully executed – forever changed Bandung's appearance and reputation. From the 1920s onward, the city was often referred to as the 'Paris of Java'.

In accordance with the planning practices of the Dutch East Indies and other colonies, AIA's plan for the hierarchy and layout of Bandung's neighbourhoods and streets reflected the city's ethnic and functional disposition. The European residential neighbourhoods were situated on the highest plots of land to the northern areas of Bandung, while the non-European residential areas were mainly situated in the lower west, south and southeast of Bandung. The European and non-European commercial areas were adjacently situated in the centre of town near the *alun-alun*. Their atmosphere was either European or non-European. The residential, governmental and scientific neighbourhoods for the Europeans were vast and moderately to sparsely populated. The parcels of land were large, the houses luxurious, and the atmosphere European. The non-European neighbourhoods, both residential and commercial, were considerably more populated and densely built up than the European neighbourhoods. Their streets were narrower, sometimes unpaved, and the houses smaller and frequently combined with shops. The atmosphere in these neighbourhoods was indigenous, Chinese, Indian or Arab. The predominantly indigenous settlements at the lowest end of the socioeconomic scale, the so-called *kampungs*, were different again. Often located in the vicinity of residential neighbourhoods or on the outskirts of a town, they were usually densely populated, unplanned, semi-permanent and generally devoid of facilities such as running water, baths and toilets.

City Analysis

Despite his objections and considerable workload, by the middle of 1932 Karsten accepted the CIAM's invitation to do an analysis of Bandung. To collect the necessary data and draw the required maps, Karsten organized a team of local professionals who were responsible for or involved in Bandung's urban development. The

first man on the team was civil engineer Arie Poldervaart. Poldervaart had been the director of Bandung's Department of Public Works since 1924 and was probably one of the most well-informed professionals with regard to Bandung's urban development. The second man was Jacques Pieter Thijssse, a civil engineer that had graduated from the Delft Polytechnic School who had worked for Bandung's Department of Public Works since 1921. The team's third man, responsible among other things for the drawing of the maps, was G. Hendriks.⁹ Hendriks had studied architecture at the Academy for Art in Groningen and worked as an architect for the national Department for Public Works (Burgerlijke Openbare Werken) in Batavia from 1918 to 1921. No doubt as a result of his involvement with the new building for the Department for Public Services (Gouvernementsbedrijven) in Bandung, he worked for the local council of Bandung from 1921; initially as general architect and later as the town's architect (Stadsarchitect). Although there is no reference to Heetjans and he was no longer with the municipality at the time of the analysis' preparations, it seems safe to assume that he was part of the team, or at least he was occasionally consulted. Heetjans was a military engineer educated at the Royal Military Academy (Koninklijke Militaire Academie) in Breda and had led various divisions of Bandung's Department of Public Works between 1914 and approximately 1928. In 1915 one of his first assignments had been the preparation of a report on Bandung's future development. As this report served as the foundation for Bandung's Extension Plan two years later, it seems likely that Heetjans was somehow involved.

Although Karsten's team was very knowledgeable about the recent development of Bandung, complying with CIAM's requirements turned out to be problematical on occasion. This was not only because data for the mappings were not readily available, but also because the team sometimes misinterpreted the required information.¹⁰ The latter happened, for example, when the Bandung team designated all roads lined with trees as 'parkways'. A mistake, as Karsten hastened to inform his nephew, that nonetheless prompted Cornelis van Eesteren to explain what parkways really were – a reaction that, considering Karsten's position and reputation in the Dutch East Indies, probably would have stung him.¹¹ Notwithstanding these obstacles though, the Bandung team was ready to send its material to Van Eesteren as early as February 1933.

The team submitted the three standard maps and a panel with Bandung's Master Extension Plan (Geraamte-uitbreidingsplan) from around 1930.¹² The Master Plan shows the allocation of various

5 T. Karsten, letter to Ch. Karsten, 19.04.1932, KFA.

6 T. Karsten, letter to Ch. Karsten, 02.11.1932, KFA.

7 A regent is an indigenous, local governor in Java.

8 'De verspreiding der departementen', in: *Algemeen Indisch Dagblad De Preangerbode* (28.09.1927), 4; Extract notulen vergadering gemeenteraad Bandung 27.12.1917, National Archive of the Republic of Indonesia, Archive of the Department of Home Affairs (*Binnenlandsch Bestuur*), file no. 1691.

9 T. Karsten, letter to Van Eesteren, 25.12.1934, HNI/EFL EEST IV.46.

10 'Overview of data missing on the submitted maps' (20.04.1933) and 'Material für Bandung, dessen Beschaffung noch notwendig ist' (Material for Bandung that still needs to be delivered) (October 1936), HNI/EFL EEST 0036 IV.46.

11 T. Karsten, letter to Ch. Karsten, op. cit. (note 6).

12 The map mentions two years: 1928 in the key, and September 1931 in the title.

DEI4 BANDUNG, additional panel showing the Master Extension Plan, 1930 → 145

building forms within Bandung's municipal boundaries: open (housing) and closed (shops and so forth), Western and Asian, and utilitarian. As buildings were allocated according to the ethnicity of their owners, the plan at a single glance illustrates a characteristic principle of colonial planning: the division of neighbourhoods based on ethnic rather than socioeconomic grounds. Although, depending on one's socioeconomic status, one could cross ethnic boundaries because the principle of an ethnically divided town plan was implemented in Dutch East Indian planning. As the symbols Van Eesteren developed for the city analyses lacked the possibility to indicate varieties in ethnicity, Bandung's Master Extension Plan was a practical addition to map I.

DEI1 BANDUNG, map I → 140

Map I shows residential neighbourhoods designated as working-class (predominantly non-European), and middle- and upper-class (European). The second category was mainly allocated to the northern half of Bandung, the first category to the southern half. What map I – erroneously, as Karsten admitted to Charles Karsten – does not indicate is the open garden city character of the working-, middle- and upper-class residential quarters.¹³ What map I does present is an extra map depicting an overview of aerial photographs. Although the overview does not correspond with the photos on the panel, the photographs reveal the open character of Bandung's layout.¹⁴ [5]

Map II designates Bandung's existing and projected arterial roads within the city's boundaries and connecting roads to other cities. The lower half of the second panel presents 27 photos of streetscapes, [6/7] various characteristic buildings and a series



5 Industrial zone belted by a residential area, Bandung, 1933

DEI2 BANDUNG, map II → 141



Geschlossene Orientalische Bauart. Kleine Verbindungsstrasse, asphaltiert, schmale Bürgersteig, Ladenstrasse.

Gesloten inlands bouwwijze, korte geasphalteerde verbindingsstraat. Smal trottoir.

6 Bandung, map II, detail, Oriental building type



Geschlossener Europäischer Bau (city) Haupt-geschäftsstrasse, asphaltiert. Auto parkieren an einer Seite, um der anderen Tag wechseln Ost- und West-seite. Während Geschäftszeit lebhaften Verkehrs.

7 Bandung, map II, detail, European building type



Groeten Typ. Kleinwohnungsbau aus normalisierte Bauelemente

Groot type der kleine woningen van genormaliseerde bouwelementen.

8 Bandung, map II, detail, standardized building for minimal dwellings

of images documenting the local *kampungs* as well as the use of standardized building techniques for minimal dwellings. [8] Compared with other analyses, the dense set of photographs taken from eye level is outstanding. It is as if Karsten was very keen on conveying the specific quality of Bandung to European colleagues and proving that modern building techniques were successfully used in Bandung.

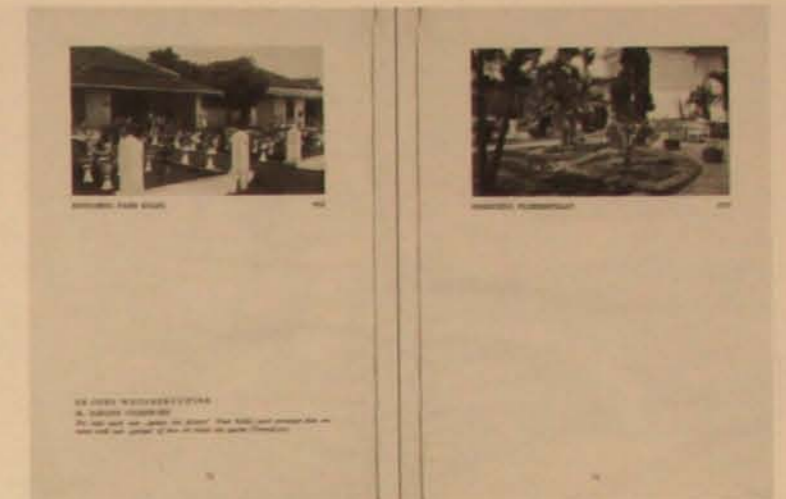
After the Bandung team sent off the final data and maps, Karsten wrote to Charles and said that he thought the end result to be rather poor, as he found the maps were highly obscure and the key symbols unattractive.¹⁵ What must have been even more disappointing was that in the end, the fourth congress' publication was not realized. This was a huge disappointment, not only because of the effort that had gone into collecting and preparing the required material for the publication, but also because Dutch East Indian architects and planners were thus left deprived of a unique and possibly effective international platform to present their work to an international circle of colleagues and other professionals.

Publications and Reactions

Although the objectives of the fourth congress, as Karsten remarked, were only partially relevant for the town planning practice in the Dutch East Indies, it is still remarkable that no contemporary Dutch East Indian journal made any reference to the colony's participation at the congress. What did seem to emerge out of Bandung's involvement in CIAM 4 was the exhibition and publication *Het Indische stadsbeeld voorheen en thans* (The Indish Townscape. Past and Present) in 1938.¹⁶ The exhibition and its catalogue were composed of photos of 16 small to large, Dutch East Indian towns taken around the turn of the century, and photos of the same locations taken in the 1930s. [9] Given the fact that there had never even been a town planning exhibition or general congress 'Just for Java' and considering Karsten's remark that because of the involvement in CIAM 4 architects and planners in the Dutch East Indies increasingly felt the need for something similar, it seems plausible that *The Indish Townscape* was a Dutch East Indian response to CIAM 4.¹⁷

A more ambitious idea that emerged out of the CIAM's invitation was to organize a comparative international exhibition and conference with contributions from non-European countries.¹⁸ For reasons not clear, this idea never materialized. Karsten twice asked Charles for the names and addresses of colleagues in non-European countries connected to the CIAM. After the second request, Charles sent details of Louis-Georges Pineau in Hanoi (French Indochina), Kikuji Ishimoto in Tokyo, Gregori Warchavchik in São Paulo and Richard Neutra in Los Angeles.¹⁹ The lack of a network necessary to successfully organize such an international event may have impeded the project's inception as well as the lack of sufficient funds and material, but also the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation of the archipelago (1942 to 1945) brought the idea to an end.

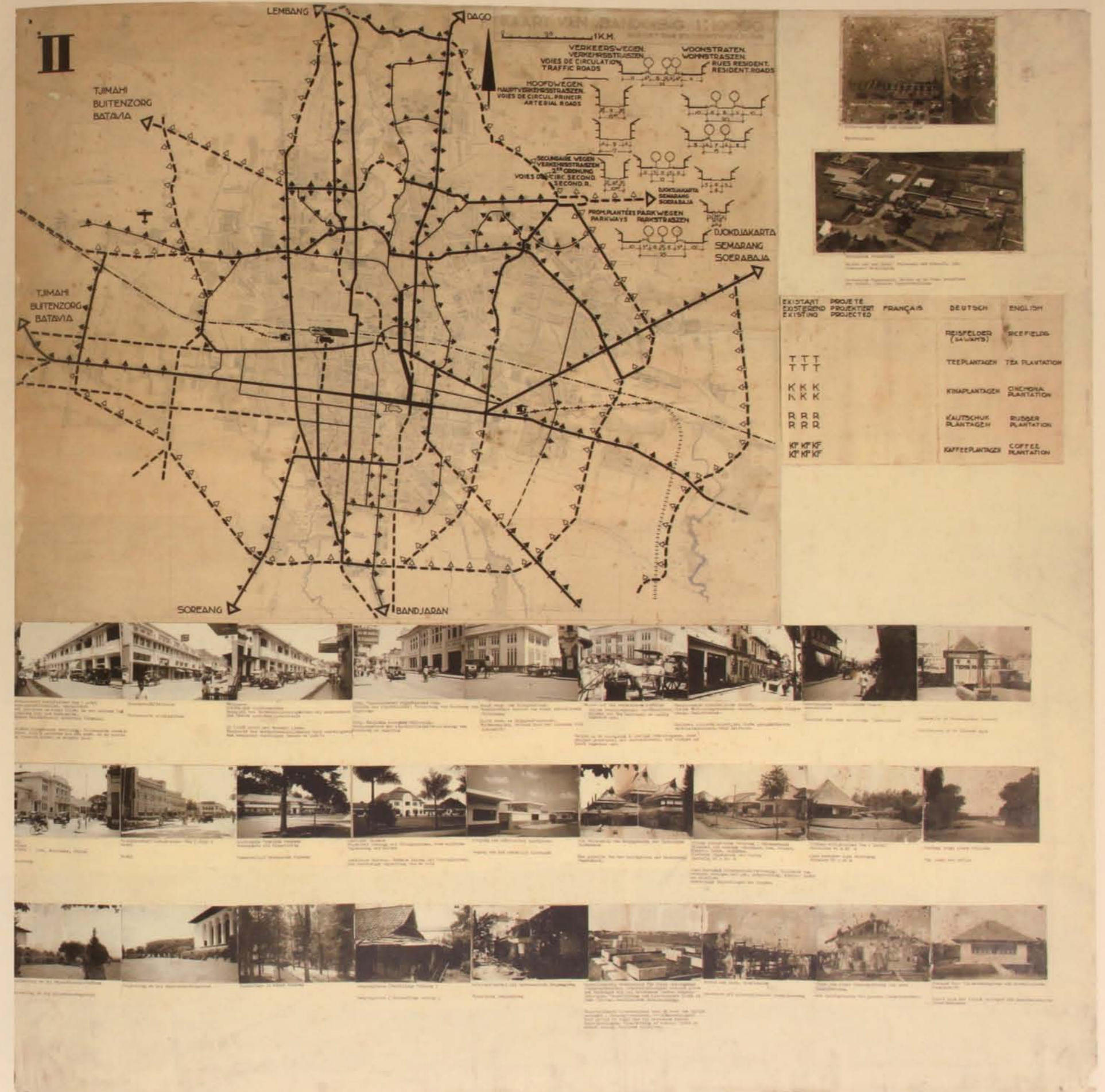
The correspondence between Karsten, his nephew Charles and CIAM-president Van Eesteren illustrates various divides between Dutch (namely Western) architects and planners and their



9 The Indish Townscape. Past and Present, 1938

Dutch-Indian colleagues. Such divides were not only created by the geographical distance and the different socioeconomic and cultural differences, but also by the lack of appreciation and understanding among Westerners for these differences and the design solutions they required. Since they reveal and epitomize some of the similarities and differences between town planning in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, the considerations and thoughts exchanged between Karsten and Charles in the period leading up to the exhibition in 1935 are at least as interesting as the analysis itself.

13 T. Karsten, letter to Ch. Karsten, op. cit. (note 6).
 14 Six locations on the map correspond with photographs in the Van Eesteren Archive, HNI/EFL EEST 0478 IV.368.
 15 Van Eesteren's response that the graphics were necessary because the publication would be in black-and-white but that the maps in the exhibition would be coloured, must have been a scant comfort for Karsten, letter, op. cit. (note 6); Ch. Karsten, letter to T. Karsten, 03.12.1932, KFA.
 16 Vereniging van Locale Belangen (ed.), *Het Indische stadsbeeld voorheen en thans* (Bandung: Stichting Technisch Tijdschrift, 1938).
 17 T. Karsten, letter to Ch. Karsten, op. cit. (note 5).
 18 T. Karsten, letters to Ch. Karsten, op. cit. (note 5 and note 6).
 19 Ibid.





Hauptgeschäftstrasse
Indien hat links-verkehr
Beispiel von Verkehrsschwierigkeiten bei Anwesenheit von Pferde zwischen Automobile
Vornameste Winkelstrasse
In Indië houdt het Verkeer links.
Voorbeeld van verkeersmoeilijkheden door aanwezigheid van bespannen voertuigen tussen de auto's

City, Geschlossener Europäischer Bau.
Gebäude der Elektrizität, Verwaltung von Bandoeng und Umgebung.
City, Geschlossener Europese bebouwing.
Kantoorgebouwen der electriciteits-voorziening van Bandoeng en omgeving

Haupt Post- und Telegraphen-Station.
Verkehrshöhle bedient von einem kleinen Polizeistation
Hoofd Post- en Telegraf-station.
Verkeersruimte, bedient door een klein politie-agent.



Rechts auf dem vordergrund 2-rädige Pferde Frachtwagen, die verführerische kleine Verbindungsstrasse, asphaltiert, schmale Bürgersteige, Seitenstrasse.
Geschlossene orientalische Bauart.
Geschlossene orientalische Bauart
Zadenstrasse
Geschlossener inländische bebouwing. Winkelstrasse
Tankstelle im Chinesischen Viertel
Benzinepomp in de Chinese wijk

Rechts auf de voorgrond 2 wielige vrachtwagens, door wagen getrokken; het vervoermiddel, dat vroeger in dit algemeen was.
Geschlossener inländische bouwwijze, korte gepaviljoende Verbindungsstrasse, Smal trottoir.



Geschlossener Europäischer Bau (City)
Technische Gemeinde Bureau
Ruesplatz mit Bürgersteig
Gemeintelich Technische Bureau
Institut Pasteur
Doppelter Fahrweg mit Königspalmen, eine einfache Begrenzung der Garten
Institut Pasteur. Dubbele rijweg met Koningspalmen, een eenvoudige begrenzing van de tuin
Eingang zum städtischen Sportplatz.
Eingang van het stedelijk sportveld



Ein Seitenteil vom Hauptgebäude der Technische Hochschule
Offene Europäische Behausung (Mittelstand)
Beispiel von moderne Wohnungen, Gas, Wasser, Elektr. Licht, Telephone.
Einfache Begrenzung der Garten
Parzelle 25 x 40 m
Offener Europäischer Bau (Luxus)
Parzellen 40 x 60 m
Offener Europäischer Bau (Luxus)
Parzellen 40 x 60 m
Bauweg lange einer Gohlucht
Weg lange een ravijn



Planting on een departements-gebouwen
Parkanlage in einem Hohlweg
Kamponghaus (Baufällige Wohnung)
Kamponghaus (bouwvallige woning)
Arbeiterviertel mit verbesserten Kanalisation
Verbeterde Kampongweg



Normalisiertes Baumaterial für Kleinwohnungsbau (Kampongkomplex, Arbeiterwohnungen) Mittels gleich und niedriger als bei bestehende bambus kampong-wohnungen. Wasserleitung und Elektrisches Licht in jede Wohnung. Geschlossene Kanalisierung.
Bau aus norm. Baumaterialien
Neubau mit genormaliserte Baumaterialien
Abbau von einer Kampongwohnung aus norm. Baumaterialien.
Einen Kampongwohnung von genorm. Baumaterialien.
Größter Typ der kleine woningen van genorm. Baumaterialien.

Genormaliseerd bouwmaterial voor de bouw van kleine woningen (Kampong-complexen, arbeiderswoningen) Door gelijk en lager dan bij bestaande bamboe kampongwoningen. Waterleiding en electr. licht in iedere woning. Geschlossener riolering.

