

## Another museum

Architectural heritage over the last two to three years seems to have become 'the right thing to be involved with' for a happy few in Jakarta. The restoration of the former offices of Indonesia's national archives (maybe nowadays better known as the Reinier de Klerk-mansion) on Jl. Gajah Mada involved both Indonesian and Dutch dedication, willpower, knowledge and money. The restoration-process and the re-opening of the building received quite a lot of attention.

However, since the restoration was completed (1998) not too many activities have been undertaken and the building gradually seems to slip back into public negligence - matching its receded situation some hundred meter away from the street. The question is what kind of activities could be initiated in order to attract a certain number of people to visit the building regularly. Because right now, while looking splendid on the outside, the interior of the main building has not much more to offer than a couple of immaculately restored rooms with the odd piece of contemporary furniture. Apart from a few rooms dedicated to the history and restoration of the building, the buildings enclosing two sides of the rear garden are empty. And it does not look likely this situation is about to change soon.

When the restoration-project was initiated the situation in Indonesia was somewhat different from today - to say the least. Economical problems and political turmoil have changed the recent course of Indonesian history dramatically. Whether this was of any influence on the Reinier de Klerk-mansion remains to be seen. For instance: the future function of the building was not clear when the restoration began and still wasn't when the restoration was finished - and has much changed neither. The building therefore now stands like an beautiful but hollow shell.

It could be (and is) claimed that all of this is due to changing circumstances during the restoration-process. This, however, also remains to be seen: lacking a clear picture of the future destination of the building from the start, any building is likely to be destined not more than a restored object. It doesn't seem fair to blame it all on political and economic changes. There must be something else going on...

The arts hardly ever make money. Most of the time they only costs money. In the Netherlands, my home-country, it was therefore decided to allocate a considerable sum of our national budget to support the arts. Whether it be theatre companies, orchestras, ballet companies, libraries, museums, every institution on a local, provincial or national level are entitled to apply for subsidies as long as they are legal bodies and state objectives, budgets, etc. And if subsidy from the government is not sufficient additional funds might be raised by seeking help from individual sponsors.

One of the criteria that is considered while deciding on an application is the objectives of the organisation and the means to do this. To my mind it is exactly this that has been missing when the restoration of the offices of the National Archives came to the fore. It seems the mere restoration itself became the objective and anything beyond this was never thought about. The result being a beautiful building in an environment it hardly seems to relate to and therefore is almost appropriate.

So what about another recent restoration-project? The former headquarters of Indonesia's national bank (formerly Javasche Bank) in Kota Jakarta are right now being carefully studied by a group of very dedicated, studious and knowledgeable architects and connoisseurs in order to turn the building (14.00 square meters floor-space) into... a museum. On banking.

Picture this. Just around the corner, not five minutes walk away are three art-museums situated: the Jakarta historical museum, the ceramics museum and the puppet museum. These museums have been there for quite some time. However it wasn't until the opening of Café Batavia on Fatahillah square (1994), the Omni-Batavia hotel on Kali Besar (1995), and recently Museum Kafé (2000) across from Café Batavia, that the area gradually became a

more vibrant and exciting area - even in the evening. Apparently it takes more than just the arts to create a certain level of liveliness - and cash-flow.

There is plenty of business going on in Kota Jakarta today: Mangga Dua is just one of them. However, for a general public the activities that are around today might not be all that attractive. That is: as long as many people prefer well-equipped and chic shopping malls they might avoid Kota to pass their leisure-time.

It is therefore that I do not understand why the former offices of Bank Indonesia, given the number of square meters floor-space, could not come up with a more inspired and vibrant idea than just another museum. If thinking commercially why not turn it into a neatly restored, not too large but exclusive shopping-centre with shops supplying exquisite and rare merchandise?

Something similar has been done in the Netherlands. In Amsterdam a Swedish entrepreneur invested in the former head-offices (built around 1890) of the National Postal Services. The building was then carefully restored and changes to the interior were made in order to meet the necessary requirements related to a shopping mall and audience. Big names like Virgin Records but also small deli's and an exclusive clothes shop for babies and toddlers have been there from the start. Ever since the reopening (1990) the building has been a success, both from a historical and commercial point of view.

And maybe better still: why not turn it into a high school or university. The corridors on the main-floor seems perfectly suitable for students to exchange notes on lectures, go over tests, etc. And students create life because they need all sorts of stuff: food, stationary, photocopies, books. And because they create a market there will be business.

And while they are there they might want to do some sports. Perfect location just around the corner: the former main post office on Fatahillah square. Seems great for many sports: inline-skating, baseball, volleyball, badminton. Just a block away so parents need to worry less about bringing their children or picking them up again.

Why can something like this not be done for the Bank Indonesia-building? In today's busy modern city-life we sometimes tend to forget these very often rather small and today not very glamorous (anymore) buildings. It is good Bank Indonesia does not forget and is daring and willing to invest time, money and knowledge in their own heritage in order to turn it into something worthwhile. I do appreciate the bank's intention to restore the former splendour of the building and it's wish to leave behind a mark of it's over 150-years presence on that particular plot right in the historical heart of Jakarta. But why not a more daring solution - including of course solutions related infrastructure, car parking, etc?

The somewhat general tendency/inclination in Indonesia to turn every historical building into a cultural destination to me seems a guarantee of a slow but certain death sentence for every one of those buildings. In order to keep the cultural history alive and kicking and to create enthusiasm amongst a general public for built cultural heritage in my mind more daring initiatives are necessary. Turning one historical building after another into a museum is not a good solution in the long run. If only because a solely cultural content will not raise enough money for the building's never residing need for maintenance. Turning buildings into museum not only is likely to turn them into a financial burden, they also run the risk to get isolated from their surroundings - the building itself becoming an *objet d'art* without any kind of relationship to it's neighbourhood anymore.

It is important for any building to be 'alive' i.e. to be used, maintained and to be part of its surroundings - and this includes the people living right next to it. The idea to create a number of museums next to each other is an attractive thought provided the buildings do not get alienate from their context and the people from them. Many buildings in Kota - as well as elsewhere in Jakarta and other Indonesian cities! - are the living proof of Indonesia's rich architectural heritage. They can not all be turned into museums!

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*Kompas* (7-1-2001)

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