

Building the Characteristics of a City or a Lifestyle?



It is common knowledge that when someone is faced with the challenges of the future he tends to refer back to his past to find some wisdom that would potentially help him move forward, regardless if he possesses an old-fashioned mindset or a modern one. The understanding someone has about his past is a constant that tells him which way to go as he moves towards his future. Should someone fail to do so, it is believed that he will experience a 'future shock,' which will result in an overall culture shock. Alfin Toffler ("Future Shock," 1971, p.20) writes, "Culture shock is a time phenomenon, a product of a society that is experiencing an accelerated change, when a new culture is superimposed on an old one without any adaptation process, resulting in a bad impact."

STORY BY Martono Yuwono



cherished, disappointing or upsetting. In his book 'de Orator' Marcus Tullius Cicero, a noted orator, member of senate, lawyer, and philosopher in the Roman Republic (106-43 BC) stated, "History is the witness of an era, a ray of truth, a life memory, an instructor of life, and a message of the past." No matter how small and insignificant a past occurrence may be, it will become a life lesson.

Preservation of History as a Movement

Buildings (including monuments and towers) and areas with historical values are considered cultural heritage. Conserving these sites will prolong their existence and values.

The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historical Monuments is the brainchild of members of the First International



History as Teacher of Life

The past is often referred to as history, sejarah in the Indonesian language, a word which originally comes from the Arabic language, Syajaratun, which means tree, ancestry, origin, or lineage. In the Indonesian language, history means an account of happenings in the past or a tale of someone's family lineage (especially for ruling kings of olden times).

Every passing second constitutes a piece of someone's history. It could be memorable,



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CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT
— Batavia in the 17th century
— Historic center of Warsaw
— Warsaw that was destroyed in World War II
— The ruins of Warsaw, Poland

Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments in 1931 who suggested the establishment of an organization for restoration advice which encompasses the critical reevaluation of restoration projects; the creation of bylaws regarding heritage buildings in their respective countries; and the use of modern technique and materials in restoration works. The Charter also regulates the reburial of historical sites which are not to be restored, the placement of historical sites under custodial protection, and the protection of the areas surrounding the historic sites.

Twenty-six years later in 1957, the First International Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings was arranged

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in Paris. It recommended the need for countries to establish institutes for historical preservation as well as an international organization comprising architects and historical building specialists. Its agenda included providing expert trainings, holding symposiums to discuss preservation challenges, inviting contemporary artists to decorate historical monuments, fostering cooperation between architects and archeologists and professional urban planners to integrate the preservation effort for historical buildings and sites into the planning and development of a city. The Second International Congress of Architects and Historical Building Specialists, arranged in 1964, adopted the international standard of professional guideline in the conservation and restoration efforts of historical buildings and sites from the Venice Charter, and created ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites).

Currently based in Paris, ICOMOS is a non-governmental professional organization created in 1965 in Warsaw that works for the preservation of historical sites around the world and part of the World Heritage Sites advisory body to UNESCO. Their restoration



works conducted for the city of Warsaw is a remarkable example of the organization's works, which do not only aim to restore the condition of the city, but also rebuild the pride and dignity of a nation.

The effort to preserve history in a city scale began after people realized that the destruction of cities, especially in Europe during the Second World War, which could also be seen as the destruction of human civilization. This incident opened people's eyes about the importance of the protection of historic towns, old quarters of cities, and villages with a traditional character. This was stated in the Declaration of Amsterdam in 1975.

This declaration raised the spirit of solidarity amongst Europeans to restore ancient city centres. This serves various purposes: for

the preservation of human values, for economic interests, and to turn the city into a place of interest for tourism purposes.

Historical Preservation and City Development

A city is a living organism which, in addition to the physical aspect, also has a soul that grows and develops along with the lives of the people. A city develops in line with the growth of human values, which, as the media for human civilization, have materialized themselves in the dimension of space and time.

Humans seek security and comfort in the city they live in. They don't want to feel alienated in their own hometown and

Historical preservation is closely linked with the nationalistic character development of a city and nation, as evident in the restoration works of historical cities across Europe and the USA. The main focus is the city centre, the old part of the city or the city's former port, all of which have distinctive characteristics that make them a treasured asset of the city, nation and state. An old town is the kernel of a city's developed future while an old port was the gate to welcome the outer world, which used to be the crowning glory of a country that engaged in trading.

Historical preservation is a dynamic effort to protect, conserve, develop and reuse a historical site as a cultural heritage by rediscovering its soul and characteristics. People long for a symbol of authority



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CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT
— Old city of Venice
— Old Batavia with Gedung Harmoni which was destroyed
— Washington DC

they want to be able to plan for the future. Therefore, the effort to protect and preserve the centres of human civilization as a restoration effort of local wisdom — one which forms the base of the city development — is a life-long commitment of the people to build the future of a city. There should be a continuation between the past, present and future values of a city that is humane in nature and also in scale. This is the basis of every effort of historical preservation: "The farther back you can look the farther forward you are likely to see" (Sir Winston Churchill).

and a moral shield to awaken a country's confidence and optimism towards the future. This resonates with cities across the globe, even in Indonesia.

The Law of the Republic of Indonesia, Number 11 of the year 2010 titled Cultural Heritage states its objectives on the preservation of cultural heritage as follows: a) to preserve the nation's and people's heritage; b) to raise the pride and dignity of the people through their cultural heritage; c) to strengthen the identity of the nation; d) to improve the welfare of the people; as well as

e) to promote the nation's cultural heritage to the international community.

We are currently entering a global era where people are challenged to build their own utopian dream of a new world without boundaries, where economic and socio-cultural aspects are integrated into the global network of communication and trade. Today, the spirit of globalization tends to increase uniformity, efficiency (from a business perspective), and secularity while promoting a contemporary lifestyle.

On the other hand, some countries strive to preserve their respective cultural identities

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While historical cities in Europe and the USA possess authentic characteristics or values, the same thing cannot be said about the old cities of Indonesia such as Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Malang, Surabaya and many others. These are colonial cities, which we inherited from the colonialists after our independence. Colonial cities were built between the 17th-20th centuries, designed by Dutch architects who also designed cities throughout the East Indies (Indonesia).



and sense of patriotism. Some even believe that globalization is a cultural process that improves the quality of life, welfare and human values. This causes a split in cultural orientation; a paradox of globalization and a contradiction between groups of cultural community regarding their corresponding cultural rights. People try to preserve their tradition and local roots as a moral shield in facing the challenges of the global era.

Therefore, historical preservation is a cultural strategy in developing the characteristic of a city and nation. It is also aimed at offsetting the modern developments in the city which tend to be detached from tradition and instead engender a consumeristic and hedonistic lifestyle.

These designers inadvertently embedded the vernacular architecture of their country within our archipelago. This could be seen as a tragedy for our nation, which has continued to erode the city's identity, resulting in the marginalization of communities supporting local culture.

For instance, Batavia was constructed in 1619 by the Dutch VOC as the exact copy of Amsterdam, which was "implanted" on top of the ruins of the city of Jayakarta founded by Fatahillah on 22 June 1527 — the anniversary of Jakarta. That's why Ali Sadikin, the governor of DKI Jakarta in 1966-1977, restored the Old City of Batavia in 1972-1974 and changed its name into Taman Fatahillah after learning about the spirit of patriotism

behind the restoration works of Warsaw and other historical cities in the USA. He also renovated other historical buildings and heritage sites, following the vision of Soekarno, the country's first president, who wished to develop the characteristics of Indonesia by developing Jakarta.

I had been appointed as the architect for the planning of the preservation of almost all heritage buildings and sites in Jakarta as well as the coordinator of the field works under Ali Sadikin and six other consecutive governors of Jakarta until the Governor Sutiyoso, which also included the planning of Sunda Kelapa old harbor area and Jakarta Waterfront City.

At that time, most people did not find it appealing to be involved in historical preservation as it's not very profitable. Additionally, most of the works were done in cramped, slum areas that had a high level of crime and were not the priority on the development agenda. Our architects were more interested in building modern, commercial structures such as superblocs and malls. This tendency is stated by Ronald Gill, a Dutch architect in his book *Change and Morphology of Indonesian Towns* (1988). He

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— Museum Kebangkitan Nasional
— Museum Fatahillah
— Museum Bahari



wrote, "The Indonesian architects have no interest in studying the absence of the city's local wisdom during colonial time. Instead they are more interested in planning and developing a modern city".

After Sadikin restored the old town of Jakarta, other cities including Bandung, Semarang, Malang, Surabaya that bear similar colonial characteristics immediately followed suit. Safeguarding historical buildings was becoming a trend, yet the effort was often limited to the physical rehabilitation of the

buildings and sites, a beautification process or a nostalgic and romantic act to reminisce about the past, a hobby or interest that follows the market flow in order to reap profit for business and tourism purposes. This is totally different from the more virtuous objectives of Cultural Heritage preservation works as stated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 11 of the year 2010 regarding Cultural Heritage.

In the past, people conserved their legacy out of respect of their ancestors who had

founded the city and its civilization. Now people restore historical objects, buildings and sites not for the purpose of rebuilding a cultural legacy that they must respect — but instead as an economic object that is driven by the open market, or as a lifestyle that mimics that of a "celebrity." When this happens, it is definitely regarded as a luxury because the restoration works are directed exclusively for the upper-class communities and immigrants. The middle and lower classes of the society, who are actually the ones who strive to support the local culture, tend to merely serve as tools or a passive audience that are often left out of the process.

In fact, in the historical preservation as a cultural process of a city's development, the most important thing is the spirit of local wisdom of the place. It defines the site and influences the behaviour and character of the people inside it. As stated by Sir Winston Churchill, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." This is the core problem of historical preservation, especially when linked to the restoration of the Colonial City that we have inherited from the colonial powers.

It is our duty to unearth and develop the local wisdom that our city founders have fought tooth and nail to establish. We must treat historical buildings and sites as cultural heirlooms and respect them like we respect our soldiers and heroes. This is a mandate, and not a luxury.

Not very many architects and city planners throughout Indonesia — even those working in the field of historical conservation or cultural heritage sites — are sensitive enough to realize the philosophy and concept of historical preservation as an integrated part of the planning and development of a city in order to strengthen the city's local wisdom characteristics in the spirit of nationalism and patriotism, as evident in various cities and countries.

According to aforementioned law, particularly articles 1 and 53, these efforts should be done and coordinated by competent restoration experts who are certified, and should adhere to the codes of conservation. A national guideline is needed so that there will be no misunderstanding and confusion in the field. This guideline should be regulated and managed as the responsibility of the country and the (local) government by empowering the society. ■

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