

# Markets and Malls in Jakarta

Research >  
Southeast Asia

Jakarta, the largest metropolis in Southeast Asia and a province in itself, is divided into five municipalities and headed by a governor. The city is a metaphor for modernity for the 200 million people in the Indonesian archipelago. Its urban area has sprawled past its boundaries, incorporating smaller towns in the city's outskirts, consisting of Bogor, Tangerang, and Bekasi. Many workers living in these areas commute to the centre hence the number of people in Jakarta varies from over ten million in the evening to over twelve million during the day. Both massive movement and rapid expansion are characteristic of Jakarta's mega-urbanization. One aspect that has recently become contentious is the conversion of trade centres to shopping centres, or 'new style of markets', throughout the city.

By Pratiwo

Two questions are prompted by Jakarta's expansion and the role markets play in it. Firstly, is it possible to build a new theory of urban design based on this phenomenon in Jakarta? Or, secondly, is the city simply a modern attainment of Le Corbusier's Radiant City or Ludwig Hilberseimer's Ideal City, unplanned and unintended?

In the seventeenth century, Jakarta was established as a market place when cloves from the Moluccas and surrounding areas were brought there for sale. The city developed a reputation as a marketplace for selling and exporting crops to the whole archipelago: during the colonial era the markets, which were scattered all over the city and outside its walls, were under Chinese control and were allowed to be open on only one day of the week.

Today, Jakarta is a true shoppers' paradise. Cheap goods can be found in Glodok, Tanah Abang, and Mangga

Dua markets, Roxy Mas sells cell-phones, and both Dusit and Mangga Dua Mall became specialized in computer hardware and software. Indeed, almost every neighbourhood in Jakarta has its malls where computers are sold and cheap illegal software can easily be obtained. Whereas some of the city's 80 shopping centres have specialized, other malls, such as Taman Anggrek Mall supply a wide variety of products and entertainment.

The old markets, Pasar Senen and Pasar Tanah Abang, are now probably the largest wholesale markets for electronic wares, clothes, and other goods in Southeast Asia, attracting merchants from every part of the archipelago who, in turn, generate other economic activities. Their economic importance is illustrated by the fact that, as a result of the fire at Pasar Tanah Abang in mid-February 2003, many clothes-related economic activities came to a halt throughout Indonesia. More than 5,000 kiosks, of which each was for

rent for 50 million rupiah, or EUR 5,000, each year, were turned to ash. Probably as many as one million people – shopkeepers, coolies, salesmen, traders, and others who worked in the textile industry – lost their jobs. A total of 4 trillion rupiahs, or EUR 400 million, was lost with the fire (see *Kompas* 22, February 2003, p. 1).

Above and beyond a classification on grounds of sector, the markets can also be characterized according to their customers' economic status. Taman Anggrek, for example, is a mall mainly for those with middle- and high incomes, who by and large come by car. This mall holds more floors for cars than for shops and parking is one of its main sources of income. As opposed to specialized malls, customers of various incomes visit the Roxy Mas and Mangga Dua Mall. The malls of Jakarta can also be classified according to the ethnicity of its customers, correlating with the respective neighbourhoods' ethnic compositions. Whereas Taman Anggrek,

Mall Kelapa Gading, ITC Mangga Dua, and Pluit Mall mainly have Chinese customers, it is mostly non-Chinese who frequent Block M Mall.

In addition to the present supply of shopping centres and malls another 20 shopping centres will soon be opened across the city in the near future. At present, crowded market places have caused transportation problems. Not only is the bus-dominated urban transport system far from effective, the train network connecting Jakarta to suburban areas, which is used by the low-income group is already overloaded in the peak hours. People increasingly use their private car to get to work and the 'three-in-one-car' scheme does little to curb traffic congestion. In the Thamrin-Sudirman area, covered by this scheme, drivers with less than three passengers found a loophole by offering a couple of thousand rupiahs (less than a euro) for the ride. Many poor serve as passengers several times a day as the city government has recently taken harsh action against some other forms of informal employment. Mega-urbanization and failure of the government to create sufficient formal sector employment have forced people to peddle goods. Unfortunately, in the Javanese New Year (Idulfritri), when the peddlers returned to their villages, Sutiyoso, the governor of Jakarta, had their stalls raided and the ped-

dlers lost their chance to earn a living.

The aforementioned development projects have radically changed public space. Since many outdoor spaces have been made unpleasant due to parked cars and traffic jams, a walk in a mall has become the new Indonesian recreational activity. Many shopping centres are guarded by *satpam* (special guardians) in order to make shoppers feel secure on their mall strolls. Shopping has become the focus of Jakarta, and has developed as part of a long-existing 'hedonistic' lifestyle.

In the past decades many strategies have been formulated for the development of Jakarta, yet every plan to establish some kind of city order and control has failed. Only through proper law enforcement can the city's chaos and disorder be changed and a working urban plan, which will control the city's development, be put into place. At present Jakarta is yet a place of negotiation, bargaining, and corruption, hence an urban plan to provide a liveable environment for the city dweller remains a distant goal. ◀

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