

Bandung Society for Heritage Conservation – a Case Study Illustrating the Involvement of an NGO for Heritage Management in Indonesia

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Introduction

This paper presents a case study of the Bandung Society for Heritage Conservation and seeks to examine the role of a Non-Governmental Organization for Heritage Management in Indonesia. It examines how the organization was set-up and how it operates, the type of activities it has been involved in and the main issues and problems it faces.

Heritage Societies are an established phenomenon in the west but in the Asian context, at least at Indonesia, they are much more recent arrivals on the scene. The paper seeks to draw on the experiences to date in Bandung and from these extracts some key lessons for successful NGO involvement in this dynamic and rapidly evolving field.

Reflecting the sphere of activities in which the Society has been most active the paper deals mainly with issues surrounding the conservation of the built environment.

The City of Bandung

Bandung is the capitol of the West Java region and is located at a height of 700m on the Priangan Plateau, approximately 200 km South East of Jakarta. With a population approaching 2 million it is Indonesia's third largest city. It is also the home of the Sundanese, a people who have a language and culture distinct from that of the Javanese.

In the early 19th Century it was little more than a village, but with the advent of the trans-Java post road in the 1830's and later in 1880 the coming of the railway, it experienced steady growth

throughout the century. This growth was helped by the vast, fertile plantations which surround the city and which grew tea, coffee, tobacco and quinine. In fact, by the beginning of World War II Bandung supplied 90% of the global quinine requirement. The cool climate also attracted visitors wanting to escape the oppressive heat of Jakarta.

It was at the beginning of the 20th Century, however, that city growth really expanded. In 1917 the Dutch Colonial government announced plans to relocate the capital from Jakarta (then known as Batavia) and this sparked a building boom in Bandung which lasted until the end of the colonial period in 1940. It is having such a proportion of its buildings constructed within such a short period, and all laid out in accordance with strict masterplanning, which incorporates spacious parks, gardens and avenues, that gives Bandung its remarkable coherence as a city.

The architecture, in contrast to most other cities in Indonesia (with perhaps the exception of Medan in North Sumatera), is that of the Modern Movement. Some of the most avant-garde styles of the day are represented. These styles show adaptations to the tropical climate and in some cases have been influenced by the indigenous architecture and culture. This blend of Eastern and Western influences has given rise to a unique 'indishe' architecture.

Vast areas in the north of the city remained largely unchanged until the 1970's and '80s. As Indonesia's wealth increases there is pressure to redevelop

with more intensive building types. These new buildings seldom make reference to the city's historic built fabric, with a result that certain areas are now taking on a decidedly dislocated feel. Many planted avenues and landscaping schemes have been lost due to road-widening. Many building decisions are taken outside of Bandung and the architects and developers often come from outside of Indonesia. In tandem with this inappropriate redevelopment, there are also areas where new investment has not been forthcoming and building conditions are deteriorating.

The Bandung Society for Heritage Conservation (Bandung Payuguban Pelestarian Budaya)

Aims

It was against this background of rapid change that, in 1987, a group of concerned individuals founded the Bandung Society for Heritage Conservation. It should be stressed, however, that the Society's interests are not limited to the city's historic buildings but also include its environment and culture. Its aims are stated:

- To develop and promote Bandung's unique identity and image.
- To foster an environment in which Sundanese art and cultural traditions can be conserved and developed.
- To increase awareness among both the private and public sectors of the importance and economic potential of the city's historic areas and urban environment.

It is perhaps unrealistic to place too much emphasis on the importance of these stated aims as in its day to day activities the Society is prepared to become involved in almost any type of project it feels can be useful. Also to do so would almost certainly over-emphasize the Society's ability to influence outside events.

Analysis of these aims does, however, give some clues to the philosophies it holds. For instance they are very much framed in the positive and it is fair to say that the Society likes to work in an

"enabling" way, acting as a catalyst for things to happen. It sees conservation as an active process and takes a "management of change" rather than a "preservationist" approach.

Finally both the "private sector" and "economic" are both specifically mentioned. Since it is the private sector which is making so many of the important decisions affecting the city's historic fabric, and given the legislative impotence or lack of commitment to tackle the problem, it is obviously a prime target. Also this is a reflection of the fact that the Society emerged from within the hotel industry, one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in Indonesia and one which has a vested interest in maintaining historic areas for their tourism potential. In the Asian context, where the legislative situation is sometimes weak or unclear, it is not always sufficient to lobby Government and expect it to arbitrate in accordance with clearly-stated policy guidelines. Often the Society tries to persuade and cajole the private sector directly. This point is returned to in more detail later.

Structure and Funding

The Society is a registered "Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat" (NGO) and has a committee of ten people, which meets monthly, and a membership of over 200. Anybody can join and it is not necessary to pay a membership fee. All that is asked is that a member must make a pledge to contribute time and/or talent and/or treasure. The membership form asks what activities members are prepared to help with and what special talents they might share. By keeping financial contributions voluntary many students have been encouraged to join.

Funding comes largely from voluntary donations and from money received for carrying out specific studies or consultancies. A lack of routine funding is a constant problem and makes long-term strategic planning difficult. There is a voluntary labour pool of among the members, but this is a facility which is sometimes hard to access, especially when trying to organize time-consuming activities which last over a long period.

The Society is fortunate that its chairman is also the President and owner of a local hotel chain and has donated permanent office space as well as supplying lecture rooms and facilities at no cost. The fact that he is also a highly respected local businessman, and was once the city's largest taxpayer, has also proved invaluable. Indonesian society is very status conscious and a respected 'name' at the bottom of a letter can open many doors that would otherwise remain closed; for example to arrange a meeting with the Mayor to talk about a particular problem.

Initial Activities

Initially a small group of people interested in Heritage Conservation gathered together and held several meetings. After sometime it became clear that unless there was some sort of concrete action the early enthusiasm would wane and the group would die a swift death. Eventually it was decided that holding an exhibition would be the best way to launch the Society, promote its aims, and attract new members.

The exhibition cost approximately \$2,500⁰⁰ and this was raised only through local businesses with the ethic that it would not be proper to solicit funds from outside the community without first having demonstrated local interest and commitment. The title of the exhibition was *Bandung's Nature, Art, Architecture and Environment*. Its scope was deliberately set very wide to embrace all the Society's interests and also to attract people from as many fields as possible. The Mayor of Bandung and Governor of West Java were asked to write forewords for the exhibition guide. This not only gave the exhibition greater status but brought its existence to the attention of government.

Even after the exhibition, however, it was a challenge to ensure that the new organization did not then lie dormant, a mere list of names, as is the case with many bodies in Indonesia. In order to keep in contact with members, a monthly newsletter, "Warta Pelestarian" was started. This is a very simple photocopied bulletin which is produced very cheaply.

A monthly mailing to approximately 250 people costs about \$ 25.⁰⁰

By way of providing a regular activity, a program of monthly lectures was initiated and has continued ever since. Guest speakers are invited to talk on a wide variety of topics which fall broadly, although not exclusively, within the sphere of heritage conservation. This program has had several benefits. First it has provided a regular forum for members to meet and where society news and requests for information can be announced. Also the meetings are advertised in the local daily newspaper and are open to non-members and in this way new members have gradually been attracted. The speakers themselves may also become members or at least will be made aware of the Society's existence and mention it to colleagues. Gradually, over time, the lecture program has established a very extensive network of contacts.

At one point these meetings, as well as including special programs, also dealt with "housekeeping" matters. As membership grew however "housekeeping" was transferred to special monthly board meetings. It is very important for the survival of our organization that board members regularly attend. When it has appeared that somebody has become uninterested, for whatever reason, they have been quickly replaced by somebody who is able to make a regular commitment.

At the outset, as it is now, a good relationship with a local newspaper is crucial not only for publishing events, but in Bandung for quite sometime a regular weekly slot appeared discussing local heritage issues in an attempt to "share the culture" and relate stories about the city.

Subsequent Developments

The lecture program and other awareness raising and educational activities, such as the running of an architectural photography course, have remained the mainstay of the Society's activities.

However, as time passed opportunities presented themselves for acting in a more direct manner, for example, by giving technical advice on the renovation of certain historic buildings such as the 1939 Hotel Savoy Homann and the 1935 Bank Pembangunan Daerah (Denis Building). The Society was also asked by the Mayor's office to suggest a suitable streetlighting scheme for the historic Brage area, where the Society had previously carried out its own urban environmental and economic revitalisation studies.

Sometimes buildings are left empty and deteriorating because they are surplus to the current requirements of their public sector owners. Unlike in the West there is no statutory obligation for such bodies to maximize the return on their capital assets. In the case of the 1895 Martadinata Building, which had been left unused by its owners the state pharmaceutical company, the Society was able to find an interested tenant and a rent was negotiated which reflected the renovation costs. Thus the building was brought back to productive use to the benefit of all concerned. No money was suggested or received by the Society for this initiative.

Networking with other organizations has proved a very fruitful way of futhering the Society's aims. One way of overcoming the problems of lack of funding and staff is to work together with organizations which do have these. Examples have included working with the Goethe Institute and French Cultural Centre to bring an architect from France and one from Germany to oversee a conservation workshop for local architectural students and young professionals. On another occasion the Society was asked to recommend two candidates to attend a USIS (United States Information Services) sponsored heritage management study tour to the United States. One name put forward was that of a Society member, but to fill the other place the Mayor's Office was approached to suggest a suitable candidate from amongst its staff. As a result an active new member was

recruited and a valuable contact in the City Planning Department obtained.

In 1992 the Society acquired its first full-time staff member, courtesy of V.S.O. (Voluntary Service Overseas), the U.K.-based volunteer sending agency.

The legislative situation as Regards Building Conservation and the Potential for NGO input

The work of the Society to date, therefore, in terms of specific initiatives over and above those related to consciousness raising, have relied mainly on private initiatives and the investments of certain individuals and organizations. While these efforts are positive and constructive, they are unable to guarantee careful and coordinated management of the historical city as a whole. This is a task which lies firmly in the hands of the City Government.

Unfortunately contemporary Indonesian planning and design concentrates very much on functional divisions and there is a complete ignorance of the contribution of urban history (Widodo 1992). It is also that many equate "old" with "bad" and "new" with "good". Conservation is often viewed as being non-compatible with economic development.

In theory, legislation exists to protect all buildings over fifty years old. This legislation and the designation of buildings as "monuments" was, until last year, based on the Dutch instigated Monument Ordinance of 1931. This was replaced with a new act in 1992 which in many respects is very similar and has many of the same shortcomings.

The execution of the legislation is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture, each of Indonesia's 27 Provinces having its own agency. However, the legislation contains very little guidance on how the protection is to be applied in practice. There are, for example, very few links between Education and Cultural Departments (regionally - based) and the Urban Planners (locally-based).

There are hardly any formal or legal possibilities to initiate a structural strategy for rehabilitation/revitalisation of the urban environment of preservation or the worthwhile architectural heritage.

In practice the only legal control is the building-permit procedure which is a technical procedure and it is not really problematic to demolish a worthwhile building if there is the intention to do so (Passchier 1992). Building permits are granted separately from location permits which fall within the domain of spatial planning. Internal coordination between these two departments appears weak. As a general point there is a lack of clearly-stated policy in the urban development field and it is difficult for a member of the public to know exactly on what criteria individual development decisions are based.

It does appear, however, that the Town Planners are now starting to at least ask questions about historic conservation, even if they have not formally recognised it as part of their plans. In 1992 the Society was asked to provide a list of buildings which it felt should be protected. There was some debate as to whether or not a list should be produced, bearing in mind that once a list is in place any building not included would be fair game for demolition. Given the lack of time to prepare the survey there were bound to be significant omissions. Also, large areas of Bandung draw their importance from the fact that there are high concentrations of buildings which are on their own insignificant but, when grouped together, constitute environments of the highest quality.

Eventually it was decided to submit a list, which contained over 600 buildings. The reasons for doing so were to be seen to be cooperating with government and also because it was said a list was needed to include conservation work as a project in the next departmental budget which was about to be prepared at the time. All government is financed on a project basis and there is scarce scope for carrying out at any routine or extra work outside of these designated projects. As well as

being prefaced with all the usual caveats, such as that it was not meant to be static or definitive, the list was also drawn up and presented as part of an overall strategy which included recommendations for "Historic Area" designations and controls. At the time of writing this paper, no news has been received as to whether or not the City Administration will be pressing ahead with any conservation work.

The very fact, however, that the Society is consulted by Government at all is quite an achievement as the legislative system tends to be very paternalistic and public participation in the planning process is virtually unheard of. Nor is it completely clear to the Society how it has achieved this status, other than by having kept up a continually high profile locally. In the West heritage organizations generally regard themselves as pressure groups. In Indonesia, though, politics are usually seen as being "consensual" rather than "confrontational" and the Society has not regarded itself as a pressure group within the Western meaning of the term, preferring instead to try and be seen as a cooperating body occupying a supportive role.

Lobbying Activities: The Singer Building

Recently, however, the Society has found itself opposing the Mayor's Office over proposals to allow the demolition of the 1935 Singer Building. The building by F. W. Brinkman, one of the best-known architects of the period, is located at a pivotal position in the city centre and exhibits many characteristics typical to the Bandung architecture of the time. The motive for demolition was that the owners of the new high rise Bandung Business Centre, which is adjacent, consider that the modest two-storey structure unduly blocks the view of their building.

The Society was fighting a rearguard action from the start since the Mayor had already signed a demolition permit after the owners had gone straight to him and by-passed the requisite planning departments. The Society arranged

meetings with both the owners, who are Jakarta – based, and the Mayor's office. An article was placed in the press and several letters were written, including one to the Minister of the Environment. A meeting of a Town Council Sub-Committee was called to discuss the issue.

Eventually, it seemed, the case had been won and the building saved although, in the absence of an open decision-making process it was not clear who precisely had made this decision, on what basis it was made and which avenue of lobbying had proved most effective. This situation creates difficulties because when lobbying it is difficult to decide where efforts should be concentrated.

The post-script, however, is that recently the roof of the building has mysteriously collapsed and the owners have filed for a demolition order on the grounds that the building is unsafe. Dirty tricks by developers are a truly international phenomenon.

Several general lessons can be drawn from this case. Before making a stand on a particular building and taking on an adversarial rather than consensus-based stance with government the merits of doing so have to be weighed against future relationships. Indonesian Government is very hierarchical and top-down in its working, therefore, the lobbying of people in the highest ranks is likely to have the greatest effect. As many channels as possible should be tried. In particular if financial decisions are being made elsewhere in the country it may be useful to call on allies there to help the campaign.

The Future

Since the Bandung Society for Heritage Conservation was formed, the first organization of its kind in the country, Heritage Conservation has certainly gained a higher profile nationally. In 1989 the Yayasan Pelestari Budaya Bangsa (Indonesian National Heritage Trust) was formed. More recently several local groups have started up in other cities such as Yogyakarta and Semarang.

In January/February 1992 a National Conference on Heritage Conservation was held in Yogyakarta and in November 1992 the First National Dialogue on the Preservation of Historic Buildings and Environments was marked by a visit of a delegation from the U.S. who attended meetings in Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Surabaya and Yogyakarta. Although no formal national coordination between the different heritage groups has yet to evolve, informal links and the sharing of information has already been greatly increased by these events. It is hoped this process will continue and a synergistic relationship will develop between the individual groups.

The Bandung Society itself has seen its first sub-group. The Art Deco Society of Western Java, formed under its auspices and this a sign that the organization is starting to mature institutionally. There are plans to initiate a Heritage Award Scheme in the city, a project which it is hoped could eventually become national. It is also aimed to broaden activities to focus on Bandung's wider urban environment and not just its buildings.

Conclusions

In Indonesia, and in many other parts of Asia, NGOs in the heritage sector are a relatively recent phenomenon. Despite being poorly funded and under-resourced it has been shown that such bodies can do much to promote the ideals of Heritage Conservation, particularly by networking with other organizations.

Intervention in the development process has to take account of the unique social and political mechanisms that exist. This is a new field for NGOs in Indonesia although it is clear there is a role to be played in providing specialist advice and support to Government. The effectiveness of such groups in an adversarial role is only just beginning to be explored.

Unique opportunities exist for the conservation of historic towns and cities in Asia (and Oceania). In the West the conservation ethic was only introduced

late in the development cycle, after it was realized that many disastrous mistakes had been made. Newly-developing nations have access to a body of heritage management knowledge right at the beginning of their development cycles and organizations such as NGOs can play a role in pushing for this knowledge to be utilized as soon as possible.

REFERENCES

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