

MEDAN
Urban development by planters and entrepreneurs.
1870-1940

by

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1. Introduction.

In the pre-colonial era, the people in the Indonesian Archipelago mainly lived in rural societies. The residences of the traditional rulers functioned as centres of culture and power. Pre urban settlements existed around some natural harbours along the coast, occupied by inhabitants of diverse origins and backgrounds.

The origin of the present Indonesian town is partly rooted in historical indigenous centres, the old coastal trade-centres and colonial settlements.

The historical urban structures form the core and backbone of the fast growing Indonesian towns with their concomitant urban sprawl.

Nowadays, these historical centres, 'Kota,' are generally threatened by incipient decay; the result of unlimited expansion, uncontrolled economic development, water and air pollution, traffic congestion and so fort.

Taking the various historical roots of the present Indonesian town into consideration, we can distinguish several archetypes :

- The indigenous historical centres of culture and rule, like Yogyakarta, Solo, Banda Aceh...;
- the former indigenous -but later- colonial trade settlements on the coast, like Jakarta, Cirebon, Semarang, Surabaya, Palembang, Ujung Pandang...;
- new colonial urban settlements, like Balikpapan, Bandung, Malang, Medan...;
- Indonesian, contemporary, new Urban developments, like Cibinong, Palangka raya, Pekanbaru...

The growth and extension of every town is a product of the historical development of human settlement, perceptible in the spatial patterns of the town and the expression in the architectural morphology.

The image of a town is defined in terms such as geographic position, cultural and historical significance, administrative and economic powers, urban and architectural qualities. In conjunction these are the factors which stipulate the affinity of the inhabitants of and visitors to the town. A present Indonesian problem is the lack of historical awareness and involvement regarding the urban and architectural environment; which obviously has to do with the colonial background of the image of the older town areas.

One feature of colonial society was the principle of dualism, not only in economy terms but also in respect of social, cultural, legal and technical matters.

In the colonial era, the leading group of Europeans was usually focused on their home country and the individual European resident participated only fleetingly in the colonial scene. The existence and appearance of the present Indonesian town owes its identity to a large extent to these peculiar circumstances.

Medan, capital of the province of North Sumatra, is a first rate example of urban development generated within the context of the Netherlands East-Indies, a colonial society which no longer exists as a governmental entity, having suffered on abrupt disappearance.

In 1872, the total number of Europeans in the Indonesian Archipelago amounted to

36.467, mostly in the employ of the Netherlands Indies government. **1)** This government held the monopoly -particularly in Java- for the export of agro-cultural and industrial products; private enterprise was insignificant and initiatives in such a direction were even met with government obstruction. In 1872, the governmental monopoly on agriculture was abolished by law and the Indonesian Archipelago was opened up to private investment and individual initiatives.

2. The East Coast of Sumatra, an early history.

In 1824, a treaty between the Dutch and British governments established the status quo of the colonial claims of both countries in this region of South-east Asia. The British withdraw from Sumatra (Bengkulu, Natal and Tapanuli) and the Dutch were forbidden to establish any settlement on the Malay Peninsula. Dutch colonial intervention in the island Sumatra was still fairly limited; Westerners had still not even set foot in the greater part of the island. The Dutch government was averse to spending funds on exploring new areas, unless they were forced to do so by particular circumstances.

Such an occasion arose in 1857, when the Sultan of Siak, on the East Coast of Sumatra, became embroiled in internal strife and fled to Singapore.

He requested the British colonial government to help him regain the throne and offered to accept the sultanate under the protection of the British Crown.

Since this request was refused by the British, the Sultan contracted the British adventurer Adam Wilson, a commercial assistant employed by the Singapore firm 'Martin, Dyce and Company', to undertake the venture. Wilson was promised the island of Benkalis and one-third of the revenues of Siak. He recruited a mercenary force of Bugis and European sailors and it was reported that, the enterprise aroused a considerable enthusiasm among the mercantile community in Singapore **2)** and equally strong alarm in Batavia. Wilson drove out the Sultan's insurgent brother, but soon became involved in a quarrel with his principal, the Sultan, and tried to put himself on the throne of Siak. This time, the Sultan and his brother asked the Dutch colonial authorities in Riau to intervene.

The Dutch saw a possible repetition of Brooke's intervention in Sarawak in Wilson's venture, so they sent a small expedition to Siak; drove Wilson out, and re-installed the Sultan on the throne.

On 1 February 1858, a political contract was signed between the Netherlands Indies government and the sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura and Siak came under the rule of the Dutch colonial government.

Historically a number of districts on the north-east coast of Sumatra, like Deli, Langkat, and Serdang, were subject to the Sultan of Siak.

The British merchants on the island Penang feared that under control of the Dutch the Siak dependencies would exclude British traders from the North Sumatra pepper trade of Asahan, Deli and Langkat. Apparently, the local indigenous rulers shared the same fear; so repeated appeals for protection were addressed to the Governor of Singapore by: the Sultan of Deli in 1861, the Raja of Serdang and the Sultan of Aceh in 1862 and in 1863 by the Sultan of Asahan. **3)** The Governor of Singapore sent the Resident Councillor of Penang to Deli and Langkat in 1862 to secure redress for alleged wrongs inflicted on British subjects.

Then the Dutch decided to announce their territorial claims and, in 1862, the Dutch colonial administration arranged political contracts with the Siak dependencies Deli, Langkat and Serdang; these contracts were counter-signed by the Sultan of Siak.

But the real challenge to establish the Dutch colonial presence in this region of Sumatra occurred in 1864. The Resident Elisa Netscher arrived in the capital of Siak Sri Indrapura to solve (in the terms of the colonial administration) the earnest problems between the Sultan and his indigenous advisers. Netscher appointed the younger brother of the Sultan, Sjarif Kasim Abdoeldapalit Saifoedin, the new ruler of Siak.

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It was in this period of turbulence, that the first economic relations between the native rulers at the north-east coast of Sumatra and the Western agriculture industries began.

Before the abolishing of the government monopoly on agriculture in Java in 1872, private entrepreneurs had already begun searching for new challenges to do business in the Indonesian Archipelago.

In 1863, a planter from Java, Jacob Nienhuys, visited the north-east coast of Sumatra and started negotiations with the Sultan of Deli, Mahmoed Perkasa Alam, in order to obtain land for agriculture. A year later, the first tobacco was shipped to Rotterdam. This was the beginning of the exploitation of the north-east coast of Sumatra by large scaled Western agricultural companies.

The aim of this article is to focus on the establishment of the historical layout of Medan; the centre of the Deli region. An example of late 19th century urban development, based on private enterprise and primarily a product of non-governmental effort.

3. Medan, pivot of a plantation economy.

In the late colonial era, the coast of north-east Sumatra enjoyed a period of great economic boom. In the region usually known as Deli **4)**, large areas of land were brought under cultivation with principally with tobacco, but also with coffee and tea, amplified by rubber and palmoil around the turn of the century. The quality of the Deli tobacco as a premium cigar wrapper was famous.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the development and expansion of the region went ahead of an extra-ordinarily fast rise. More and more land concessions were conferred by the Sultan of Deli and occupied by Western companies, with head-quarters in Europe or the USA.

The Dutch company, the Deli Maatschappij, became the largest and most powerful in the business. The later urban layout of Medan was mainly developed on the land concessions of the Deli Maatschappij.

In the years, following the settlement of the first planters in 1863, the indigenous harbour Labuan-Deli, at the mouth of the Deli River, functioned as central point for administration, staple trade and harbour facilities.

The historical seat of the Sultan of Deli was in Labuan-Deli; where a small garrison of military troops, a customs house and a post office, represented the colonial government.

Very soon, in the period 1870-1880, the role and significance of Labuan-Deli began to ebb. It was clear that the flourishing site of Medan would become the centre of the Deli region and, moreover, the northern island of Belawan emerged as a better situated natural harbour. When the colonial city of Medan is considered as the centre point of a plantation economy, the significance of the Deli Maatschappij is undisputable.

The modern town Medan owes its existence to the decision of the Deli Maatschappij in 1869 to establish their administrative centre at a location at the confluence of the Barbura and Deli Rivers, about 10 km south of Labuan-Deli. The site of this settlement was known as Medan Putri **5)** and nearby to the south, the kampung **6)** Kesawan, on the West bank of the Deli River, and also one of the main settlements of the Batak region, Sukapiring.

4. Planters society.

From the first beginning, the planters in Deli were an international group, which consisted of adventurers, all kind of people seeking for something; a world of men between the ages of twenty and forty. Their lodgings scarcely differed from those of the indigenous Malays.

Several novels, like 'Rubber' written by Madelon H.Szekely Lulofs, provide vivid descriptions of this world: **7)**

'The houses of the Europeans, were raised high on wooden piles: a square box, separated into four smaller squares with half length walls of raw planks. The living

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accommodation was closed off with mosquito netting. Looking up you saw a construction of tree trunks, tied with rattan, bearing the atap roof **8)**, here and there fastened by an enormous iron nail. At twilight, you heard the rats chasing each other. Cicaks clung to the walls, staring intently, waiting for the mosquitoes, as yet still buzzing around in wide circles. If a breeze rustled through the roof, a shower of fine dust descended over the table, dinner plate and glass, your hair, hands and your bed. The furniture was of no account. Who cares, you owned nothing as a youngster. A few pieces of furniture made of rattan, a couple of green plants, a writing table, a bed, and, the most necessary of all, a water filter.

A cracked little staircase took you from the bedroom to a slimy scruffy floor and an old cement tub from which you scooped the water to throw all over yourself: oh those bathroom! When taking a bath, you hung two towels over the chinks in the wall, because you wouldn't like the servants looking at you in the state in which you were born. On the veranda and in the living room an oil lamp encrusted with dirt and sooty, dangled from some rusty iron chain.'

The economic success of the tobacco culture, not only attracted the interest of the planters; it also generated an enormous need for labourers, coolies, employed under contract to the companies.

The Malay people who lived on the coast were few in number and the Batak people from the inland viewed the occupation of their territory with a certain degree of enmity.

The land grants, sold by the Sultan of Deli **9)** to the Western companies, were actually largely illegal. Supported by the Netherlands-Indies government, he granted uncultivated grounds in concession, but only part of this belonged to the Deli sultanate. The local Batak people protested and tried to obstruct the exploitation of their land by the Western agricultural companies.

In 1872, the central government sent a military expedition to punish the Bataks, intervening in favour of the Sultan of Deli and the agricultural companies. From that time onwards, the Bataks were considered unsuitable to undertake regular employment on the plantations.

In 1863, Jacob Nienhuys was already recruiting, Chinese coolies from Singapore. During the colonial era, at the East Coast of Sumatra, there were more than 300.000 Chinese registered on arrival in Belawan, while more than 100.000 Chinese left north-east Sumatra again. **10)**

The British colonial government of the Straits Settlements objected the Deli coolie recruitment in 1877 and refused to co-operate in this business. In retaliation, the D.P.V 'Deli Planters Vereeniging' **11)** organized their coolie recruitment directly from China and they also started to contract male and female coolies on large scale from Java.

At the end of the contract period, these coolies often stayed in the region, which made Deli, and in particular Medan, a multi-racial society of with various roots.

The Chinese population were strongly represented in Medan and were chiefly active in the trading and commerce. In 1905, the population of Medan contained approximately 6397 Chinese, 3705 other Asiatics, 3195 Indonesians and 954 Europeans. **12)**

5. Urban development at the beginning.

Around 1880, eleven years after the establishment of the Deli Maatschappij, the embryonic urban grid was already recognizable; although the environmental atmosphere had nothing to do with the morphology of a townscape.

The great wide area, about 175 m x 275 m; item later known as the 'Esplanade' **13)** was originally part of a tobacco plantation and later a quagmire of mud and water.

On the north-Westside was a house belonging to the Deli Maatschappij and a little further on the barracks of the military garrison. Before 1880 there were no hotel facilities in Medan and the house of the Deli Maatschappij functioned as pasanggrahan (quest house), hospital,

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church and public auditorium.

In 1884, a small hotel was established on the Southern side of the Esplanade, on the location of the Grand hotel Medan (nowadays a bank building), nicknamed 'de Pijpenla' (pipe box). It was the home of the colonial club 'Gezelligheid in Deli', which liked to stimulate theatrical and musical performances.

The Deli Maatschappij founded a railway company the 'Deli Spoorweg Maatschappij' in 1883 and in 1885 the railway between Medan and Labuan-Deli was inaugurated. The railway station was located on the western side of the Esplanade.

The colonial club 'de Witte' has been founded in 1879, but its plaster and brick premises were only completed in 1887, with the post office it formed the northern side of the Esplanade.

The urban environment did not really change during the next twenty years. It was only at the end of the first decade of the 20th century that the plot on the Western side of the Esplanade was filled with permanent buildings.

Meanwhile, the kampung, Kesawan was transformed drastically into a commercial district. At the main road, called Kesawan, already tens of toko's (shops) were established, mostly managed by Chinese people. These shop houses had only one storey with the living area in the rear and the commercial area in the front. The construction techniques of the shop houses and warehouses were based on locally available materials, wood and atap roofs, combined with Chinese architectural influences; after the big fire in 1899, they were replaced by buildings in plastered brick.

The backbone of the town layout was formed in the eighties of the 19th century, and it can still be recognized very clearly nowadays. Planters and Chinese entrepreneurs gave birth to the modern city of Medan, in a turbulent process of interaction, in which the colonial administration played a subordinate role.

6. After the turn of the century.

The Netherlands-Indies government acknowledged the developments on the north-east Sumatra coast with the establishment of an Assistant-Resident in Medan, in 1879. A monumental building, in Victorian renaissance style, arose in 1898 on the western side of the Deli River, to lodge the Resident. Except a few details, the building was highly reminiscent of the Singapore post office, which was built around 1874.

When viewing the architectural landscape of Medan dating from this period, one can recognize the influences of the British colonial architecture from the other side of the Straits of Malacca. The planter community of Deli was strongly focused on the Malay Peninsula, 'Malacca', especially on the island Penang and on the city of Singapore; because the centre of the Netherlands-Indies administration, established in Batavia in Java, was about 1500 km away and hard communications were difficult.

In accordance with the shift of the economic centre from Labuan-Deli to Medan, the Sultan of Deli, 'Ma'amoen al Rasjid Perkasa Alam Sjah', resettled in Medan as well and, in 1887, he built an imposing palace (Istana Maaimoon); it was designed -as told- by the Italian architect Ferrari, on the west bank of the Deli River and it was finished in 1891. Comparing to his former Malay-style residence, the new palace showed the remarkable progress in his financial position, gained by concession contracts and land taxes.

South-west of the Sultan's palace, the great mosque (mesjid raya) was built in a Moroccan style with stained glass windows was built in 1906, designed by the architect Dingemans.

Following the policy of decentralization, a region council 'de Afdeelingsraad van Deli' was founded in the year 1906, only to be abolished in 1909, when Medan obtained the status of independent municipality. **14)**

In 1907, an operation was launched to reform the currency on the north-east coast of Sumatra. The British colonial Straits dollar was banned and the Dutch-Indies guilder introduced. This was followed by the establishment of the Javasche Bank in Medan.

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The architect C.Boon, in the employ of the Deli Maatschappij from 1898-1911, designed -in 1909- the building of the 'Javasche Bank' on the western side of the Esplanade; but the central board of bank-directors rejected this building.

Then the Afdeelingenraad van Deli bought the building, so the municipal council of Medan had in its possession a ready-made representative town hall. The Captain-Chinese, Tjong A Fie, endowed the townhall with a clocktower in 1913.

The Javasche Bank gave the Amsterdam architect Eduard Cuypers a commission to design a bank building, which was finished in 1909. The building was also located at the Westside of the Esplanade between the townhall and the former Hotel de Boer.

In 1909, Eduard Cuypers started an office in Batavia in collaboration with M.J.Hulswit and the architect A.A.Fermont joined in 1910. The team 'Hulswit- Fermont, Batavia and Cuypers, Amsterdam' probably became, in terms of architectural production, the most successful combination of architects in pre-war Indonesia.

The first important work of Eduard Cuypers was the -above mentioned- Javasche Bank in the centre of Medan and subsequently, until 1929, he was responsible for 14 bank buildings for this banking firm in a number of cities.

During the years of its existence - in Jakarta until 1954 - a great number of architects were employed by this office and, considering the variety of the architectural production, we must conclude that each architectural design was the inspiration of a specific architect.

However, in the buildings of the Javasche Bank we recognize the hand of Eduard Cuypers. He brought the standard concept with him from the Netherlands to Indonesia; it is a vision of architecture which seems to have been strongly influenced by the Empire-style in use by the British in India and other colonies.

In 1923, Berlage qualified these buildings as being designed in 'a modernized and feeble Renaissance'. **15)**

The year 1909 was obviously very fruitful; the B.O.W. **16)** architect J.Snuyf designed a new post office, a replacement of the former one, built in 1879, on the Esplanade.

This building was the first example in Medan of an endeavour to achieve an innovation in architecture. The post counters were situated in a circle in the hall on the ground floor. The hall was covered with a domed ceiling, the emphasizing shape of the outward form dominated the architectural volume; the architecture of the other facades drew its inspiration from the traditional Dutch gable form.

The British firm 'Harrisons and Crossfield', a British rubber and export company, erected an office building in 1914, on the western corner of the Kesawan/Esplanade.

In 1929, the 'Nederlandsche Handel Maatschappij' **17)** built their office at the south-Westside of the Esplanade; a building in modern architectural style, which can be compared to the office building built in the Kota of Batavia/ Jakarta. Both buildings were finished in the same year and designed by the same architect, J.D.de Bruyn, from the Architecten en ingenieursbureau Hulswit en Fermont, Weltevreden en Ed.Cuypers, Amsterdam.

The building is a superb example of modern architecture, a clear architectural concept with double facades to prevent direct sunlight reaching the inner rooms; in contrast to the architecture of the earlier Javasche Bank buildings, there is only a minimal use of decoration and ornamentation.

The urban environment of the Esplanade/ Lapangan Merdeka was determined up to the present era of the beginning of the 1930s.

Until 1927, the northern side, the large open area in the middle of the Esplanade, functioned as a sports ground.

The first movies were showed in a barrack on the Esplanade; this was the initiative of a former planter, who owned three modern cinemas in the 1930s. After 1927, the heart of the Esplanade was finally put to use as a park.

In the meanwhile, the Kesawan/ Jl.Jend.Yani was transformed into a modern (Western) shopping street, with continuous street facades in different storeys; the buildings display

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various architectural styles: neoclassical and Chinese influences, to Art Deco. The profile, scale, and atmosphere was (and is) very European, similar to the Jl.Braga in Bandung or Jl.Malioboro in Yogyakarta.

Until the mid-twenties, the roads were not paved. On only a few there had been some attempt at hardening by gravelling. The phenomenon of the water-wagon, just drawn by oxen or mules and later motorized, spraying the dusty roads, was a very familiar occurrence.

7. The Colonial Town.

The Colonial Town hosted living and working facilities for different kinds of people in very various social positions. The image and appearance of the colonial town is an expression of colonial society showing great differences in the arrangement of the urban areas and architectural morphology. There were the European commercial districts and neighbourhoods, permanent and semi-permanent buildings, Chinese shop houses/ 'toko' and warehouses/ 'gudang' with dwellings upstairs, industrial and pasar-buildings **18**), the indigenous kampung areas (often spontaneous settlements, religious buildings like mosques, klentengs **19**), churches...

After Medan reached the status of an independent municipality in 1909, the enormous lack of adequate regulations was recognized and also a concomitant absence on governmental experience. There was no evidence of any formal town planning before the 1920s.

Very few financial funds were available and hardly any rates contributed to the municipality income. An atmosphere of competition prevailed between the municipality and the central civil administration, regarding territories, competencies and responsibilities.

The great shortage on building plots was another basic problem; a curious phenomenon which was finally solved in 1919. The Deli Maatschappij renounced land from their agriculture concessions from the Sultan, who then granted it to the municipality. Through this deal, stimulated by the government, Medan obtained a large amount of land, particularly in the south-western area.

We have already underlined the role and position of private initiatives and investment in the 19th century. In the 20th century, the private involvement was been of a tremendous significance to the development of Medan.

Apart from the construction of the railway in 1883, the Deli Maatschappij founded a hospital in 1885, a telephone company in 1886, and, in the year 1905, a water-supply company 'Ajer Beresih' (clean water).

To devote attention to the role and meaning of private initiative, the tobacco planters united in the 'Deli planters Vereeniging' (DPV), the rubber planters united into the 'Algemeene Vereeniging van Rubber planters ter Oostkust van Sumatra' (A.V.R.O.S) **20**), and role of the Chinese entrepreneurs should also be a subject for consideration.

The colonial society was based on racial segregation; the distinction between the divergent populations was even established by law. The leaders of the Chinese urban populations were nominated by the colonial administration and designated with semi military ranks, like lieutenant, captain or major.

In Medan, around the turn of the century, the Captain-Chinese (later Major) Tjong A Fie was a very remarkable man. Arriving in Deli as a coolie, he very soon achieved the status of wealthy and respectable man in the Chinese society in Medan and he became the natural leader of the Chinese population, confirmed -in 1886- by the colonial administration. **21**) A businessman and owner of various large scale properties; he was also active in industrial enterprises such as an oil factory in kampung Glugur; in short, he was very involved in all kind of business activities.

The social-democratic parliamentarian, Hendrik van Kol, wrote in 1914 **22**), 'without the co-operation of the Captain-Chinese it is scarcely possible to build a house in Medan'.

Tjong A Fie was also, a remarkable personage on the colonial stage. On the one hand, he

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took a lot of initiatives like, the founding of a Chinese trading company and --in 1910- he made efforts to improve the healthcare of the Chinese population. To improve the Medan urban-infrastructure, he granted the a pneumatic machine for clearing out the cesspools in 1911 and in 1917 gave Medan the 'Tjong Yong Hian' bridge.

But, on the other hand, Tjong A Fie leased the opium monopoly and obtained the gambling (dice playing) licence from the central government and, as van Kol remarked, was involved in the exploitation of a about thirty brothels.

The relations between the divergent sections of populations in colonial society in terms of power and influence can be characterized as complicated and based on an unstable and highly sensitive balance. The colonial administration did not always assume in an authoritative and leading role.

8. The Late Colonial Era.

In 1930, Medan had 74.976 residents, divided in 37.096 Indonesians, 27.180 Chinese, 4.292 Europeans and 3.408 Arabs or other Asiatics. **23)**

Around 1900, the Europeans lived at the northern and western sides of the Esplanade. Their dwellings were often constructed in wood. Adapted to the principles of the Malay dwelling, such as elevation above the ground in order to catch the breeze and to avoid floods, rising damp and termites.

However, the ground plan was adapted to the needs of a European household in the tropics. The architecture of the European dwelling in Medan was quite different from those in Java, where the neo-classical bungalow was very popular, particularly in the 19th century.

The building trade began to develop in the first decade of the 20th century, when the first building-companies and architects arrived from the Netherlands. The needs for administration, trade, and shop buildings, housing, and so fort, in the fast growing town were hard to meet.

As society changed, so did the architecture; in the new developments of the town, in conception and expression, architecture became a European product. Sometime after 1900, the architectural concept changed, from the wooden planters house to a type of house in British cottage style, wooden houses with a basement of stone. In the town extensions of the twenties and thirties, the architecture of the European houses referred to an architectural concept which could be found all over the Indonesian Archipelago; a universal detached house with tiled roofs, sometimes two storeys high, a garage and some outbuildings.

The Chinese population lived and worked in their shop houses mainly in the commercial district Kesawan and in the adjacent area on the eastern side of the railway; a rectangle urban grid comprised of main and secondary roads. The buildings in this area were in possession of just a few Chinese owners.

These multi-storey shop houses, they were quite similar in architecture with those in Malacca.

As the name suggests, the shop house allows for both domestic and economic activities in the same building, with business located on the ground floor and living accommodation for the family upstairs. The upper storey projects over the street to provided a sheltered arcade for customers and pedestrians. The arcade also constitutes an unifying element for linking of the shop houses into a consistent street facade.

The Indonesian population, separated into the indigenous Malay residents and immigrants mostly of Javanese origin, lived mainly in the so called 'Sultans kampungs' in the south-east area and in kampungs on the outskirts of the town.

The small group of Arabs and other Asiatics, mainly from British India, usually lived and worked on the western side of Kesawan.

Around 1918, the municipality took its first steps toward playing an active role in public housing and hygiene. In 1919, they ordered a kampung-regulation **24)** and tried, by realizing model-housing projects, to influence the quality of low budget housing. The boom in

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expansion of the kampungs was difficult to keep under control and, for the group of less financially privileged Europeans, it was almost impossible to find a home in the overstrained housing market.

In terms of quantity, these municipality contribution did not make much sense. The financial resources were limited and the project initiatives small scale. It was clear, the quantity needs for public housing would not be solved by the building of model projects. The municipal housing department tried to stimulate the kampung people to improve their housing conditions. An idealistic point of view, which ignored the few financial opportunities available to the kampung people.

The municipal housing department implemented kampung-improvement projects, built model kampungs and also houses for the less well-to-do Europeans and Indonesian employees. The implementation of (town)kampung improvement projects really started in 1925, with financial support from the central government. Roads were improved or constructed, unhealthy mud pools were drained and water and public bath facilities were introduced (hydrants).

9. The Polonia Extension.

As a result of the land transaction in 1919, the municipality gained the former tobacco plantation 'Polonia' **25)** to the south-west of the Deli Maatschappij. In the Polonia extension they built the garden city of Medan. The boundaries of the Polonia area were formed on the west by the Deli River and on the east by the Barbura River. On the south, the Medan-airport, Polonia, was inaugurated in 1928. The funds necessary -for the development of the airport- were raised in the old- fashioned Medan tradition by private initiative, in this case a joint venture of the societies of tobacco and rubber planters (D.P.V and A.V.R.O.S).

The important north-south road Poloniaweg/ Jl.Iman Bonjol, had already been in use from around 1870 as a transport road between the tobacco plantation Polonia and the headquarters of the Deli Maatschappij for shipping of the tobacco by prau-transport to Labuan-Deli.

Apart from this historical transport road, the designed urban grid in Polonia featured a new important north-south artery, the Manggalaan/ Jl.Diponegoro which was connected in the South with the east-west road, the Sultansweg/ Jl.Jend.Sudirman and in the north with the open field in front of the complex of the Court of Justice **26)** (1914); which was used until the thirties as sports ground for playing football and tennis.

Except for a few secondary roads, the neighbourhoods were located on the east-west street plans.

Around 1930, new development activities started to the south of the Sultansweg/ Jl.Jend.Sudirman. Due to the economic depression of the thirties, the building-activities made slow progress. Calling to mind the urban layout of southern Polonia (Nieuw Polonia), one can recognize a continuation of the northern area.

Until the 1950s, the entire Polonia area functioned as a typical European neighbourhood.

10. Urban and Architectural Heritage.

The colonial town concept, in the first decades of the 20th century, generally featured a spacious urban grid. The Indonesian town, in its terms as successor of the colonial town, has been for the last fifty years like a sponge absorbing the growth of industrial and service facilities and the tremendous increase of the population.

Up to the present time, the historical centre has functioned as the carrier of the Indonesian town Medan, the 4th city of Indonesia; a town which already has about 2.100.000 inhabitants. **27)**

Since 1940, the population of Medan has showed an enormous growth (more than 25

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times). The consequences of this expansion are noticeable: the loss of open space, traffic congestion in coherence with the erosion of the urban environment, the loss of economic potentials and social declining.

Yet the former Esplanade/ Lapangan Merdeka is still the natural and functional heart of the town. The old Kesawan/ Jl.Jend.Yani, has ceded the role as a main shopping centre to the modern shopping plazas (as they are called); the environment still breathes the atmosphere of the late thirties, with examples of contemporary architecture, unfortunately often featuring a cheap and anonymous business character, among the Indo-European shop houses.

It seems just a matter of time before, as the result of economic growth, the historical urban environment will become totally affected by demolition and vanish in history.

On one hand, there is no argument to conserve an urban environment in its historical appearance as just a prime asset; a town is a living organism and not an open air museum. On the other hand, one could assert that a great lack, of a coherent vision on urban and architectural heritage or city-management, seems to be a main problem of the Indonesian city in general. Buildings do suddenly disappear, street facades do descend from a characteristic coherence to a disorderly collection of dissonant architectural products.

In Medan, we also observe an explosion in scale, as a result of a process of transition, a provincial town is changing into a metropolis. In the centre are the new building plots, several times bigger than the original ones. The new buildings like offices, shop buildings and so fort, are designed in a modern international architectural concept, as happens in other countries as well. But it seems clear that the city of Medan owes its identity to a great degree to the qualities of the urban fabric, some street/square-facades in relationship to the environment and certain buildings in different town areas.

If there is no general consonance or political commitment regarding the importance of the historical and cultural values; assets such as: environmental revitalization in relationship to economic and cultural planning, and preservation matters (in short city management) will not be recognized as important issues; it is clear, Medan should - within a short period- feature the anonymous image of an average big town somewhere in the south east Asia region.

Lately in the contemporary newspapers have been launched a careful discussion about the values and meaning of the urban- architectural heritage in Medan. This discussion was based on a negative impulse, namely the demolition of a number of characteristic buildings.

The amendment of the national legislation has recently caught the interest of the Indonesian government. In March 1992, a new law on 'Monuments' was proclaimed. **28)** This law is a replacement for the old 'Monument ordinance' from 1931, which status was actually a dead letter in Indonesia. **29)** The implementation of this law, on all governmental levels, is now the next challenge. Medan, the capital of the province North-Sumatra, still accommodate an unique urban and architectural heritage, which is strongly related to the contemporary history of the entire region of north-east Sumatra.

Cor Passchier May, 1994. (some revised in November 2008)

Notes

1. Bernhard H.M. Vlekke
Geschiedenis van den Indische archipel
1946, p.358.
2. C.M. Turnbull.
The Straits Settlements, 1826-67.
p.170.

Medan: Urban development by planters and entrepreneurs, 1870-1940, by Cor Passchier

3. C.M. Turnbull.
The Straits settlements, 1826-67.
p.171.
4. It was usual to call the entire region 'Deli', because the western exploitation of agriculture started in this sultanate. Referring to Deli in this context, are included the regions Asahan, Deli, Kuala, Leidong, Palawan, Serdang and Siak.
5. Probably a reminder of Princess 'Putri Hijau', who built a small fortress (benteng) at this location; which fortress was destroyed by an Acehnese invasion in the late 16th century.
6. A local settlement, in an urban context, the term is used for slums as well.
7. M.H.Szekely Lulofs.
Rubber, roman uit Deli.
2nd edition, p.15-16.
8. Woven (nipah)palmleaves, commonly used as roofing material in the traditional Malay houses.
9. In 1873, Tungku Ma'amoen became Sultan of Deli.
10. Ursel Wolfram-Seifert.
The urban area of Medan; growth, development and planning implications.
Hamburg university, 1987, p.471.
11. Deli planters association.
12. H.H.van Kol.
Driemaal dwars door Sumatra en zwerftochten door Bali.
1914, p.63.
13. Singapore and Calcutta also had their 'Esplanade'; which actually meant an open area between the citadel and the houses of a fortified town.
14. Stadsgemeente.
15. H.P.Berlage.
Mijn Indische reis.
1931, p.31.
16. BOW, 'Burgelijke Openbare Werken', Public Works.
17. Dutch trading company.
18. Market building.
19. Chinese temple.
20. General association of rubberplanters on the east Coast of Sumatra.
21. Tong A Fie died in 1921 and was succeeded by Major-Chinese Khoe Tjin Tek.
22. H.H.van Kol.
Driemaal dwars door Sumatra en zwerftochten door Bali.
1914, p.64.
23. Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië.
Part 7.
1935, p.273.
24. Kampong bouwverordening Medan.
25. In 1869, the Polish Count Michalsky obtained a land concession in the neighbourhood of Kampung Baru. He kept the Polonia plantage until 1890, the year it was taken over by the Deli Maatschappij.
26. Raad van Justitie.
27. Since the extension of 1974, the town Medan is includes the areas (kecamatan) Labuhan, Deli, Timur, Barat, Baru, Kota, Denai, Sunggal, Tuntugan, Johor.
28. Law nr.5, year 1992, Republic Indonesia, statute book 1992, nr.27.
29. Monumenten ordonnantie, staatsblad 1931, nr.238.