

*Hasan Poerbo*

It is a challenging task to respond to such a thoughtful presentation. I have been trying to relate this to my experience as an educator and as a practitioner in housing for the poor.

It is perhaps not precisely what has been experienced in various countries where you have the classic debate whether the architect should stick to his profession as a designer of buildings and spaces or whether the architect can get into other equally important activities to do with housing with the danger that his unique skills become diluted.

I am reminded by an event in my country when we were young architects. There was a debate about whether the role of an architect in practice should be a defined one or whether he could go into other related occupations and still be called an architect. There was a feeling against what you could call perhaps “unpure” architects. Unpure architects at the time were looked upon as being second-rate architects and this created a protest from these people who were called second-rate architects because they felt that they were being unfairly looked upon as people who were escaping their responsibility as designers. They claimed that they had of their own free choice, entered other occupations as contractors, or bureaucrats because they felt that they could contribute more in that field.

It was a complex situation at that time. After 20 years, it was resolved in a way that very much supports what we are discussing here. In addition to the Indonesian Architects Association, whose members are skilled architects, we have also got what is called the Indonesian Association for Architectural Graduates which includes people in other walks of life. There is a potential here whereby people according to their capabilities and commitments can go into any profession they want to, stemming from their education as architects and designers. It is our education as architect and designer which perhaps gives us the potential to deal with complex problems which are being posed in the field of human settlements and in housing.

No other profession looks at human settlements in the way that the architect has been educated to look at it, from various perspectives and with an ability to translate that in a synthesis. What is being confronted by architects in developing

countries, is a problem of magnitude and complexity without any historical precedence. The problem of housing for the masses in the west differs significantly from what we are being faced with in developing countries. In the west you have got the institutions to employ architects as designers in a process which results in housing construction.

In developing countries, we are confronted with the problem that there are no such mechanisms. For instance, we are confronted not with organised client systems but individuals within the low-income groups who are living together and who are not able to organise themselves to employ architects. This is one of the most difficult problems which we are confronted with if we want to serve these people. They are not organised to be served. You have to create out of these individuals a planned and organised system. The cooperative movement is something which can help in organising people like this to become a client system for architects who are designers. Otherwise there is no way to communicate except on an individual basis.

There are several commonalities in the issues of housing in developing countries which determine the role of the architect. Governments have limited resources, financially as well as managerially. In Indonesia, amongst NGOs especially we are rejoicing that the government has few funds because what it means is that the government now has to rely more and more on the capability of communities to mobilise their resources. So there is a role there for the NGOs. Here is a situation, from the point of view of the NGOs which is seen as more rewarding. The housing delivery system by governments, private developers and the cooperative sector combined is still inadequate to deal with housing needs. For Indonesia only 7 per cent to 10 per cent of the housing need is being supplied by the formal housing sector. Informal housing is the only effective method which is affordable by the poor but it has the propensity to erode the quality of the environment.

There is also the problem of land as a strategic resource in housing. It becomes more and more inaccessible and unaffordable for the masses of the poor people. The future holds no hope that urban populations will not increase. It will continue

to increase at a more rapid pace. There will be an increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

The number of architectural graduates is still very limited on the one hand and on the other hand, many are underemployed. There is the dilemma; on the one hand we have got many graduates, on the other hand they do not have work. But there is a great need for housing for the poor so there is something wrong with the education system and also with our practice. I see that there are perhaps obstacles in the attitude and perception of graduates which makes them unemployable in this situation.

I have been working with my former students who have become very interested in the field of housing for the poor, and I see that those who have become interested in development studies and techniques in public-participation become more effective. So we have introduced participatory-action research as part of our education to see how far students can understand the complexity of working with people.

We have been experimenting with public housing. We were asked to advise the public housing authority to look for ways in which they can cut production cost and develop layouts where communities can be involved in maintenance and operation. So it is a special interpretation of the social structure and through that came the idea to organise them as communities whereby maintenance and operation can then be given over to the communities. We have also experimented with central area redevelopment where people have been moved from an area because of a fire. The problem there is how can you help people who have been pushed off their land by fire to come back again in a situation where the government has no funds. These people have lost everything but what they did not lose was the place where they are working.

We employed design consultants who understand the roles of NGOs in making what you call social preparations and cooperating with a developer who understands also that he has to restrain himself and not get too much profit. The NGO did the social preparation informing a group of what we call *Kaki Lima*. *Kaki Limas* are peddlers and small traders. They have

been formed as a cooperative and then they became the client. The consultants are helping them with everything, from establishing the cooperative down to preparing designs, getting the permit from the local government and also getting credits from the bank where the developer became the guarantor. So it was the kind of consultancy which the population needed, I call them development consultants — where the potentials of the architect as a designer can be utilised to the full. That project has resulted in one of the finest designs for central area redevelopment in Indonesia, with the cheapest investment which has created the opportunity for the traders there to get twice the daily income they formally had.

It is something which goes beyond ordinary design and is a result of a total performance. It is this kind of approach, which I would like to advocate. I agree fully with what has been presented by John de Monchaux on the architect as designer because indeed he can be very powerful. But what is needed in situations that we are faced with, is the institutional infrastructure and the climate for design which is not usually there. It has to be created. It is not the designer who decides directly for the client but a process is developed that becomes interactive.