Social Mall: Barter, Trade, Exchange: Reinventing Public Space

Jakarta is not well served with public space. Its museums, parks, and libraries are popular enough as public destinations, but these facilities are rare and most are not well maintained. Shopping malls, by contrast, are amongst Jakarta’s most lively and well-attended collective spaces. This is so much so that malls have become default “public” spaces of the city. In general, Jakarta malls are well-maintained, air-conditioned, comfortable, safe and strategically located in the city. Jakarta and its extended metropolitan region is currently served by more than 150 malls. Yet by Southeast Asian standards, this is a relatively modest number. Bangkok, for example, has a ratio of one mall for every 171,000 inhabitants, whereas Jakarta’s ratio is one per 372,000 inhabitants. From the point of view of the developer this is an opportunity, and recent business surveys in Jakarta have suggested that the mall culture has room to grow. The construction of malls has been adopted by the municipal government as an effective way of delivering “public” amenity: a collective space can be provided without taxing the public purse, and in addition the local municipality benefits economically from mall development. So promising is the mall that in 2006, the then-Mayor of Jakarta, Mayor Sutiyoso, famously sought to build 100 new malls as a means of short-circuiting more typical forms of urban planning.

The downside of the flurry of mall construction in Jakarta relates to the relative failure of such facilities to be both truly public spaces and to integrate into the urban fabric in which they are located. The essentially privatised, largely middle-class logics of the mall means that there are many who are excluded from such spaces. Indeed, many malls exclude locals and service only more middle class, drive-to users. Malls also generate traffic problems, and cause water and air pollution. Neither government, private enterprise, nor community pressure can resolve these problems on their own. Only a new synthesis of cooperative and collective action can begin to roll back the deleterious consequences of runaway mall development, governmental weakness and neglect of physical and social infrastructure.
Map of Jakarta showing standalone and cluster malls
The Social Mall project proposes to insert public programs and facilities into malls that have low occupancy rates and empty commercial spaces. Architects SHAU, Andramatin, and Alex Wall have collaborated to explore the consequences of introducing non-typical programs, such as museums, libraries, and sports facilities, as well as spaces for street vendors. By encouraging a greater diversity of the population into mall spaces, they become better embedded in the community in which they are located. The Social Mall project is designed to seed new cross-programming capacities that might serve as a model for the programmatic mix of fully operational, more inclusive, and locally better-integrated malls. The proposal has a site-specific logic in which a more diverse set of reciprocal exchanges is cultivated between a mall and its local context.

Project 1
INFILL-TRADE
Poins Square Mall in Lebak Bulus

The Mall gets abundant visitors and the neighborhood gets their library, theatre, playground and other long-awaited facilities.

The Poins Square Mall is chosen as an example of standalone mall. Analyzing the neighborhood of Poins Square (30,956 people in a 1.2km radius), we find out that it lacks over 34,800 square meters of public facilities including multimedia library, health clinic, small mosques, multi-purpose hall, playground, activity park, indoor sports facilities, public theater and art gallery.

The mall itself is a curious case where half of it is working well, while the other half is completely empty. It is a destination for computer, electronic and hobby shopping in the district with a large supermarket at the bottom of the mall. Poins Square Mall has over 12,733 square meters of empty space waiting to be reprogrammed.

Limits
Only the programs that can fit into the mall can be accommodated. Thus in order to “solve” the whole 1.2 km-radius neighborhood problem, we need other buildings or networks of buildings. This is the natural limitation of the size of the mall, and therefore we proceed to the next scale.
Project 2
HI-BRIDge
Cluster Malls Around Hotel Indonesia Roundabout

By having connected malls, we can optimize consumption within a small amount of time. The time usually spent in traffic can now be spent on more shopping. A bigger part of the city gets the resulting spillover effect.

Intervention at the level of clustered malls, in this case Thamrin, Jakarta’s central location, gives an opportunity for further urban renewal due to the scale and demands of the site. Here we expect the different mall owners to collaborate to increase sales (“coopetition”- The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping) under the guidance of public officials and architect/urban designer.
The Social Mall proposes to add linkages to the following malls: Plaza Indonesia I & II, JACC, EX Plaza, even Sarinah Thamrin (the oldest, first mall in Jakarta) in the form of pedestrian boulevards, bridges and ramps, where the missing public programs of the middle-low income settlement are also to be inserted there (calculated from the needs of the 37,532 population within a 1.2km radius). The task of this project is also to provide workers of the office towers with lunch facilities, where a careful collection and organization of currently dispersed street vendors may reactivate the last piece of nature in the area: Waduk Melati. A green network to the upper-class Menteng settlement can be made by directing the pedestrian boulevard to Menteng. The next step is to connect these interventions with public infrastructure: there are two existing bus and train stations, and a planned monorail station that will connect this development to many parts of the city.