Concrete: Politics in the Development of Modern Architecture in Indonesia

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Abstract. The more we get into the modern era, concrete existence precisely becomes a doubt for architects and critics. They have arrived at concrete is something that doesn’t have reciprocal principles and forms if we are willing to bring ourselves further by accepting the thought that concrete is the formation of various parameters. This paper aims to see concrete not only technical terms but in how concrete influences the growth of modern architecture in Indonesia, adjusting deep-rooted culture and the political order. I will see the architectural development at the beginning of independence and the New Order era; that use concrete and are significant to criticize architecture, culture, and politics. Analysis of theoretical construction is needed to identify a new perspective of critical thinking of architectural, as well as the analysis and synthesis is applied to the comparative analysis. The use of concrete technology become the countenance and considered monumental, and as a result, the notions from the actors build a modern representation. In material discourse, concrete has been widely studied, interpreted, and innovated. Thus, this research expected to be the content of empty niches in all the diversity of its applications, beyond the sphere of engineering and architectural realm.

1. Introduction

In the development of a country, architecture plays a significant role in shaping the perception in what era a nation stands. Indonesian architecture composed from many interventions, driving factors, and political events, from the colonial period to the present; political factors, cultural values, economics, the presence of globalization, technology, transportation – all of these influences the development era in architectural discourse in Indonesia.

Politics, in modernization, takes a substantial role to move a thought on how to get to ‘a goal.’ Along with its expansion, politics indirectly becomes a universal view that in the social order, these things become indicators of progress, becoming an agreed way to achieve modernization [1]. Modernization will always refer to historical revolutions in the past, each goal containing the presence of power, which in this case is politics itself. Therefore, behind a power, there will be someone who gives orders and instructions, the actors who are the key to a movement. The connection with concrete is a material that describes modernity. Adrian Forty (2012) simply emphasize: “To talk about concrete means talking about modernity.”, this view gives the understanding that concrete is part of modernity, but implicitly not merely concrete is a direct influence on modernity, but we need to examine its presence in modernization through aspects, events, and processes that form a modern perception itself. In this study, I assume the enforcement of this view on the development of modern Indonesia through concrete.
2. Method
This research is a study that uses historical methods. Focus on the role and decisions of the government in the influence of physical development in Indonesia. Data collection is done using literature studies, archives, and interviews. In presenting the results of the analysis, especially in describing several political events, it is carried out in a descriptives analytical form that better explains the events in the dimensions of space and time that occurred in the past. It aims to provide an understandable view in understanding the flow or pattern of events more fully and deeply, both in the background, the causes and consequences that occur after the event has passed [2].

3. Results and Discussions
3.1. Concrete, an Idea of Modernity
What is the meaning of a modern? Advanced, or current? In what realm? In various ways, people interpret some modern ideas, but when we are giving the prefixes, it changes the meaning to the things related; as well as a process of shifting attitudes and mentalities as a society to be able to live according to the demands of the present. There are many things related to modern, in this study, concrete.

The connection with concrete is that it becomes a trigger for change in civilization. Heuristically looked at the philosophy of thinkers about concrete, as explained by Forty before, this is undoubtedly not assessed through empirical evidence. Architects, experts, and historians have their interpretations of the existence of concrete. Famed American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, for example, questioned the aesthetics – the art and the human notion of it – were presented by concrete [3]. Because there is no definite precedent even for the concrete representation itself when viewed in terms of its classification; whether the material is liquid or solid; have a smooth or rough surface? This undefined depiction triggers my assumption that this polemic has the potential to go further when we open our minds about how it was created, constructed in the development process, and its innovative journey.

Forty shows his more striking view, that concrete is related to modern, at the same time un-modern or what he calls 'telluric backwardness' which is a condition in which concrete slipping back into its origins – means blurs from modern achievements. The development of concrete does not lie in a single innovation but rather a combination of several scientific practices and a process of trial and error in its production. Concrete is considered as an advanced thing in the realm of scientific technology, its presence is attached to the application of principles that are inherited theoretically and practically, through a series of experiments conducted by experts and skilled workers, it makes concrete as a material that has varied technological developments until now. And when it is at the point of failure, this is what makes the 'crown of modern' embedded in its collapse, and it goes on and on. This old trail that makes concrete has a smudge in the view of historians, though for me, this is a very measly impact on its presence as advanced material and its benefits for civilization and culture. Especially in its role and politics, to elevate the name and dignity of Indonesia in development after becoming a sovereign country.

3.2. Indonesian Political Conditions in Early Independence
Indonesian politics in early independence has an unstable condition, given by the many events and political upheavals that have occurred. From the referral of Dutch sovereignty to Indonesia at that time in the form of the Republic of Indonesia United States (RIS) and all its requirements [4], the adoption of Liberal Democracy under the 1950 Provisional Constitution (UUDS 1950), until the return of full power to President Soekarno in Guided Democracy. Soekarno’s dislike triggers the change in the democratic system in the implementation of Liberal Democracy, which turned into a venue for mere economic power struggles. Related to Soekarno criticizing the democratic system policy and the law, because this system was felt to trust the president's power and control held by the cabinet.

The implementation of Guided Democracy is a point that signifies the birth of Indonesia as a country that is heading towards modernity. Beginning with the strengthening of the government taking power of attorney by the President as well as the new cabinet formation using the 1945 Constitution, and eliminating dictatorship in a powerful way but with decisions based on the will of the society. During a state visit after the implementation of Guided Democracy, Soekarno got a new view of a sovereign
Indonesia. The desire to make modern Indonesia through architectural discourse also encouraged by the eagerness to let go of the shadow of the colonial state. In his 1959 speech, President Soekarno stressed that the year was a very significant year for making a decision (The Year of Decisive) and at the same time was considered as the year of “Rediscovery of Our Revolution” to carry out the massive development going forward [4].

Whereas starting in 1960, in the Indonesian era, President Soekarno gave the term of the development level on a large scale preceded by symbolic cultivation of the building of the Pola Building marking the start of the First Phase of National Universe Development Plan, in 1961-1969. In the Nation and Character Building mission, Soekarno wanted Indonesia and its people to become something new, giving rise to the courage to meet life with an open mind, with high self-confidence, as well as vigorous physically and mentally, based on high dedication, achievement, behavior and virtuous, commendable and honorable [5]. Therefore, through architectural discourse, in which there is a highlight intervention about the material used in the national development; concrete.

3.3. The Influence of the Cement Factory

There was a headline on an article as shown above: “Semen Gresik Group, Focus on Operational Strategies to Strengthen the Platform Towards a New Era.” This highlight was referring to the view of the new era – after independence – which was supported by the strength of strong cement as one of the concrete forming materials. The intervention of the first President of the Republic of Indonesia, Soekarno, who wanted national development, must use concrete, to build monumental buildings that were sturdy and timeless.

It is Semen Gresik Group, one of the pioneers of the largest cement factory, which plays a role in Soekarno's megaproject cement production. Inaugurated on August 7, 1957, having subsidiaries located in Tuban and Gresik, East Java, PT Semen Gresik has a production capacity of 8.2 million tons/year (the highest data achievement until 1991) [6]. Concrete and modern became the ideology of the president. Its application in equalizing Indonesia with other developed countries in architecture completed through a modern approach. Abidin Kusno (2000) argues for Soekarno: “His power regime was not like Majapahit in the 14th century, but nowadays, it is symbolized not by ‘ceramic tile’ but by ‘reinforced concrete’” [7]. From this, I see the indication that politics and ideology move in the development of modern architecture in Indonesia.

One of the moments of the cement industry's utmost role in national development is in the Istiqlal Mosque project. This inclination is because the orders from the president to use all the perpetual materials, such as concrete with cement sand and its reinforcement. The impact is visible in the presentation of the highest increase in domestic cement consumption in 1961 in the span of 1920-1965 by 73.6% with 788,000 tons of cement (in 1961 the construction of the Istiqlal Mosque – experiencing ups
and downs and cessation of inflation until 1966). Entering the 1960s domestic cement consumption increased sharply.

3.4. National Identity: The Politics and Development of Modern Architecture in Indonesia

In the realization of a sovereign and modern Indonesia, the Old Order was clearly expressed through monumental development using contemporary materials. This movement has the same view with the pattern of development of countries towards the latter-day direction when Soekarno made a state trip since the commencement of Guided Democracy. Among them, in my view, the profound resemblance is Brazil. In short, the movement of Brazil began with the intervention of the then Brazilian president, Gêulio Vargas, through his ambitious program focusing on the development of Rio de Janeiro as the capital by starting to build new ministry buildings fronted by architect Oscar Niemeyer with monumentality, the first to be built was the Ministry of Education and Health Building. Through modernism, it represents the Brazil movement to bring forth new cultural identities or the creation of national identities conditioned by the Baroque concept of the architecture of colonial Brazil [8]. I see national identity is the integration based on European Style, brought by colony; and International Style, brought by Avant-Garde revolution – referring to Corbusian formal and theoretical discourse.

National identity is communicated through a parliament building which is considered to give rise to the dominant of a pluralistic society, hence the search for national identity in architecture intersects with the political structure of the country [9] as well as conducted by Vargas in Brazil, in Indonesia, the one that reflects it is the iconic CONEFO building. The similarity between Brazil and Indonesia in terms of goals, political movements, even in terms of population demographics, tropical countries that rely on the results of agricultural and mining natural resources; making the pattern of the development of modern architecture has its characteristics for the colonial state. Especially in architectural monumentality. The pattern reveals how the experience of actors behind the development and formation of national identity is the principal part and holds control over the movements that occur within a country.

![Figure 2. Ministry of Education and Health Building, Rio de Janeiro (1936). Le Corbusier, Lúcio Costa, Niemeyer, et al., source: David Underwood (1994).](image)
Figure 3. CONEFO used to be conference building that brought the New Emerging Force (Nefo), as Soekarno’s ambitious form of carrying out the foreign policy. Source: Avianti Armand, et al., (2014)

Regarding Indonesia, which is known to have multi-culture, this triggers the question of why modern development does not represent Indonesian culture – or one of them? The unfinished project in the Old Order era was forwarded by the New Order government under President Soeharto which start in 1967. If Brazil created an alternative base between the Baroque architecture of colonial Brazil and Avant-Garde revolution to lift the national identity, the Soeharto regime had the Javanese centrist principle as an expressive form characterized by an enormous and formal unity.

The traditionality of Javanese architecture then became propaganda in the political medium of his regime who wanted to "throw away" the dominant accent of the previous one. It reflected from the establishment of the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII) which is regulated far from the Soekarno’s project – those parliamentary buildings and monuments that located in a massive boulevard in central Jakarta – indicates a new propaganda that is forgetting old memories by giving new space [10][11] as is known that TMII is a constellation as well as a form of representation of multi-cultural existing in Indonesia into the pavilions. This constellation of different entitlement symbols in the centrist triggers a Javanese monopolistic power where the Mandala concept concentrates the vital in the center, and modern buildings in the outer layers [12].

Figure 4. The Pavillions of Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII). Source: tamanmini.com (2018)
This syntax of traditionality and modernity paving the way for Indonesia to achieve a monumentality to elevate its degree to a modern nation. The stretch of the novel concept does not merely refer to 'westernization' which has been considered more advanced in the ideas of modernist and urban architecture but slightly attempts to create 'traditions' of national politics based on traditional spatial and political representation [7].

4. Conclusions

Nation and Character Building in Old Order and Javanese centrist in New Order paving the way to modernity explicitly or implicitly in their ways. Concrete was presented as the incarnation of the word 'modern' in the monumental development of the city of Jakarta which had been filled with mobilization and various events which were actually considered by Soekarno – as his collective memory – being an opportunity for Indonesia to show itself as a sovereign country, as a symbol of state unity. Presented with gigantic buildings, symmetrical dominance, and vertical lines. While continuing the 'modern project' of the previous unfinished regime – added new development as an effect of capitalism such as office buildings, flyovers, etc. – Soeharto’s regime carrying Javanese Architecture. Java as a representation of Indonesian monumentalism by strengthening a new view of traditionality in architecture, which according to him, the unity will become a national identity. After that came several office buildings that had traditional elements in roof formation, decorative sides, and naming with Javanese accents.

Monuments will always be attached to two things; collective memory of an event in the past, and eternity. As monumental architecture, architecture is encouraged to put our recollection as firm as possible. But to whom is the collective memory addressed? One actor or parties will always hold powerful control of the collectivities. Therefore, there will always be different interests in architecture in each era.

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