Port cities

Port cities are the nodes of distribution networks and have developed in different ways. Three models predominate and, between them, emphasize inner-city quays, dock extensions, market systems, destination logistics and relations between port cities as part of a network. These Western-biased theories attempt to explain, but fall short of fully understanding, the evolution of port cities and their present and future role. Using Jakarta as a model provides a necessary complement.

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In the model he calls Anyport, Bird (1971) examines the port’s layout. Hoyle’s Model (1988) emphasizes the role of technological developments in relation between port and city. Van Klink’s Rotterdam model (1993) conceptualizes the port as belonging to a network and addresses functional and spatial transformations within this context. These models cover technology, spatial arrangements and management but neglect the role of culture in structural changes of the port, whose value and meaning to society have changed over time. The most spectacular transformations occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, when city and port began to separate. Ports functioning as the heart of their cities became detached transit points for distant goods, eventually turned into distant industrial sites ignored or left deserted by the city. The rapidization of waterforts and dock areas enticed the city back to the port with the possibility of creating high-standard living spaces. Especially in the 1980s, dilapidated port areas were renovated, with cultural tastes overriding functional principles. The port has again assumed its role as a logistical centre, relaying goods from distant sources to remote destinations and everywhere in between, while the port’s role of the information age has evolved into the centre of an urban network extending far beyond any previously imaginable horizon. Accounting for culture, then, there are really four dimensions to port city development: technology, spatial arrangements, culture and management.

Take technology. As it develops, ports must adapt. For example, steam power first allowed ships to travel to and from the open sea on wind and tide and permitted scheduled services (Layen 2000: 13), maritime industries contributed to the distribution of energy and food products, industrialization’s appetite for oil augured the spectacular rise of the container, most often on timber transport. Containers first appeared in Tanjung Priok in the 1970s and a container terminal opened in the 1980s. Container transfers increased from 3,000 in 1973 to 310,000 in 1984. During the 1990s, toll road system upgrades improved access and helped increase transfers from 500,000 to 1.5 million. The spectacular rise of the container, most often transported inland by truck or rail, has spurred plans for port expansion and land reclamation with private sector participation in accordance with current decentralization policy.

Port development created two busy harbours: old and new. But haunted by traffic jams, malfunctioning drainage, poor sanitation facilities, illegal and rundown housing, ‘open plots of land’ (Veering & Compagnons 2004), the old town of Sunda Kelapa deteriorated and suburbanization marginalized it from bustling Jakarta. Partly executed plans to salvage its historic character restored old buildings, created recreation and tourism activities and a toll road, but a master plan incorporating high-quality housing, the so-called Jayakarta Waterfront, conceptualizes a complete revitalization.

Modern transport will increasingly integrate Tanjung Priok into a harbour system determined by container operations offering worldwide services (Insa Paper 1997). Singapore will function as the regional loading centre and Tanjung Priok will operate regional services supplied by local ports. Sunda Kelapa, once the main port of call for Asian trade, will retain its function as the inland sailing port fuelled and supported by the ever-expanding toll road system, and the Jayakarta Waterfront conceived around the former harbour will provide an important new leisure destination.

Jakarta both confirms the relevance and demonstrates the inadequacy of existing theoretical models of port city development. Current theory cannot explain a dual harbour that includes a traditional port for a wooden sailing fleet. But the harbour’s history, environment and culture can. Supplementing current theory, Jakarta illustrates how important the uniqueness of a harbour is to the port city.

References


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