

How to change things together – Notes on Perhutana. A Family Forest. A project of Jatiwangi Art Factory

Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF) is a community, established in 2005, that embraces contemporary arts and cultural practices as part of the local life discourse in a rural area. Their numerous activities, always involving the local public, include a video festival, a music festival, a residency program, a discussion series, and a TV and radio station.

They are located in Jatiwangi, a rural area in Majalengka, a small district in West Java.

In 1905 Jatiwangi began its clay industry, which has been rooted in the culture of the people, processing clay into roof-tile and becoming the biggest roof-tile producing region in Southeast Asia.

A hundred years later, using the same clay, JaF encouraged the people of Jatiwangi to create a collective awareness and identity for their region through arts and cultural activity and to cultivate clay with more dignity, in order to increase the collective happiness and pride of the community. One of their main projects, Kota Terakota (Terracotta City), marks the beginning of a new clay culture for Jatiwangi, that envisions the city re-modeled on its people's desires and their collective agreement. In this sense, Kota Terakota speaks about "terra" not only as a material, but also as a land, a territory, and an idea.

Since the last 10 years, the area of Jatiwangi has been projected by the Indonesian government as part of a strategic industrial area called "Segitiga Rebana". The acceleration of development process is carried out to support industrial companies, and there are at least three major infrastructure projects that have been built and surround Jatiwangi: Kertajati International Airport, Patimban Port, and Cirebon Harbor. This wave of industrialization has brought a lot of changes, not only regarding the geographical landscape and its ever-increasing population density, but also the cultural and social landscape, and the economy. Northern Majalengka is planned to become an industrial district, with 6.500 industrial factories and 13 new sectors that produce an alarming amount of carbon emissions that will harm the people who live in the region. Due to this situation, JaF has developed a project called Perhutana, which experiments on models of working together, as a practice and whose mission is to find a way for a "liberated land for the forests", as well as to define a new method to build collectively a forest¹.

Perhutana (Perusahaan Hutan Tanaraya) stems from the idea that human beings are well-known forest invaders, from a small to a large scale. As reported in their description of the project: "From chopping down a single tree, deforesting for individual necessity, to deforesting a whole virgin forest for infrastructure excuses, no matter how trivial each construction is, eventually it will raise a conflict. This forest development is planned as a solution for numerous conflicts such as ecological, social, and cultural conflict. This initiative, is also a commitment to raise awareness and atonement for those who harmed Mother Nature".

Perhutana is a part of the Kota Terakota project, that aims to reclaim an eight hectares area as a sacred (conservatory) land.

This land has been divided in lots, of 4x4m² each, that can be acquired through a crowdfunding process, by singles or group contributors in order to build a forest and preserve the source of one of the most basic human needs, oxygen.

Every contributor becomes the co-owner of a land lot which will be donated for the Sacred (conservatory) Forest, and receives a cultural certificate, designed and made of soil brick, together with a digital certificate.

In this historical moment a project such as Perhutana, seems able to shine a light on the practical possibilities of "doing things together" in order to face the menaces that come from the environmental crisis, underlining its deep connections with extractivist capitalism, property regimes and social justice, suggesting that one of the most powerful tools to transform the contemporary condition is through collaboration, sharing and mutual respect between human and non-human forms of existence.

The possibility to take part to the Perhutana collaborative process is still currently open to everyone who shares the same intentions and wants to join this initiative in order to promote a better and more sustainable world for future generations.

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¹ All these information have been gathered through the website of the project. To find out more: <https://perhutana.id>