A symphony of the senses

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There are hundreds of thousands of villages in Indonesia, but there is something that makes Jodipan and Tridi stand out. Not long ago, both villages transformed from scruffy neighbourhoods infamous for environmental issues and poverty into the vibrant tourist hotspots of today.

Words & Photography: Claudio Sieber
A s we glorify the lifestyle within megapolises and their distinct neighbourhoods, we tend to neglect the easy-going village life in the less charming outskirts for obvious reasons – most suburbs offer no architectonic excitement, neither fancy bars and restaurants, nor museums and eye-catchers, to amaze our senses. Consciously, we rarely add such places to our tourist maps. Meanwhile, most people inhabiting these outskirts chase jobs in the cities, because there is simply more on offer.

But what if rural-urban dwellers decide to turn their homes into an outdoor art gallery to make their village name count? Warna-Warni – a “colourful village”. They reached out to Indana Paint, a paint company in Malang, who agreed to fund the project as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility Programme. Jodipan was first to go through the makeover, and its neighbours from Tridi followed shortly after in August 2016.

Walking through the narrow alleys in the village is like diving into a rainbow. Every house along the small lanes functions as a canvas for murals and graffitis (mostly three-dimensional), showcasing the creativity of local street artists and artist communities. It’s no secret that most of us love selfies – consequently, a stroll through the village will take a good while. For some visitors, it might feel a bit awkward to stop in front of people’s houses overlooking their kitchen, and indeed the lack of privacy was probably an issue the locals couldn’t foresee back then. However, the villagers I talked to on my visit assured me that they don’t feel bothered. Some kids even showed me their living rooms with pride. “Before, the entire village was a Kampung Kumuh – a dirty village,” recalled Murny, a local living in Tridi. “It was difficult to earn money, but presently the money is coming to us.”

The current state of most settlements throughout the country is comparable to the former ‘dirty village’ status of the two villages. Not only do they have ‘colourful villages’ to call home, the residents of Jodipan and Tridi also have the opportunity to increase their livelihoods by offering souvenirs, paintings, and delicious local food. In the beginning of the transformation, people living in Tridi were forced to witness the ongoing upgrade of Jodipan on the other side of the river bank, and prudently they sent out a sponsorship request to the local paint company.

“And they sponsored us,” said Murny, flashing a smile.

Until the renewal, household litter flooded the river which divides the two villages, but today, revenue from ticket sales is put towards proper waste management for both communities. Salaries increased and overall prosperity for the two villages improved. When venturing around, I observed kids playing happily in the colourful alleys with their parents in their new working space just next to them. All you need to do is to take a look over the other side of the bridge, and one can imagine how Jodipan and Tridi must have looked like before their rebirth as “Kampung Warna-Warni”.

Clockwise from top left: Getting lost in the narrow alleys is part of the fun whilst exploring Kampung Warna-Warni. A view from the bridge leading to Malang - Jodipan (right) and Tridi (left). A walking bridge will soon connect both villages. Although Tridi and Jodipan have now become tourist hot spots, all traits of being a small Southeast Asian village remain. Stairs painted by locals in the colours of the rainbow. Happy kids are posing and show off their school books.

It all started with a glorious idea from eight students from the Department of Communication Studies of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. To fulfil their study requirements, they created a project to upgrade a slum village into a Kampung Warna-Warni. To fulfill their study requirements, they created a project to upgrade a slum village into a Kampung Warna-Warni. To fulfill their study requirements, they created a project to upgrade a slum village into a Kampung Warna-Warni. To fulfill their study requirements, they created a project to upgrade a slum village into a Kampung Warna-Warni.