

Jakarta Biennale: City gives a little, takes a little

Evi Mariani

THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

How much does it cost to place art at public spaces?

The committee of this year Jakarta Biennale's Battle Zone has the answer: Hundreds of millions of rupiah, dozens of official letters, several trips to the city hall and a lot of headaches.

The cost was incurred even though the event was organized by the city's own Jakarta Arts Council and was included in the city budget and program.

One of the artists commissioned for the international art event, Ari Dina Krestyawan, wanted to run text around a crossing bridge on Jl. Thamrin about the people who used the space every day. The bridge has equipment to display text for advertising.

The Battle Zone committee asked for a time slot to use the equipment for Ari's project.

"We were first told by the billboard association that the time slots were being used by [a cellular phone provider]," Ardi Yunanto, the curator for the Battle Zone, told *The Jakarta Post* on Monday.

"But, the city administration has some slots there. We were led to the general bureau at the administration."

Three officers and several letters later, Ardi's team got nothing except

an instruction to write more letters and wait longer.

"Time was running out. It was January and the art work needed to be on display early February. Finally, I told the artist to make an audio visual simulation about what would happen if we're allowed to run the texts there," Ardi said.

Battle Zone has brought artworks to several public spaces: Menteng Park in Central Jakarta; a wall along Jl. TB Simatupang toll road in South Jakarta; several roads in East Jakarta; four billboards in Central, West, and South Jakarta; two train stations; National Monument (Monas) Park in Central Jakarta; and the space under a flyover in Tebet, South Jakarta.

"The mural along the toll road and exhibitions at train stations received permits with relative ease.

"We met with an officer of PT Kereta Api at Kota station [in West Jakarta] and he gave us a permit for the exhibition at Kota and Tanah Abang stations," Ardi said.

"The toll road operator was also quick to give us a go ahead."

For the exhibition of Daniel Kampua's work at Monas, the committee only met twice before receiving the green light. Kampua could display his photo exhibition about Monas' mobile photographers without any charge.

Menteng Park was a whole different story.

Artist Cecil Mariani planned to have three billboards at three spots in the park. The billboards would



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Soccer nostalgia: Artist Cecil Mariani plans to display a billboard depicting parts of Persija stadium in Taman Menteng, Central Jakarta, where the stadium was located years ago. The works were unfolded for the public Thursday, about two weeks behind schedule due to bureaucratic hurdles.

bear pictures of Persija stadium, which previously stood at the park.

After several meetings and clinching the permit, the committee was asked to pay a fee of Rp 100,000 (US\$8.9) per day for each board.

"That's on top of 'wisdom' money asked for by the park attendants. One of them told me, 'to ease closer ties between us here and your products', they wanted Rp 200,000 per day," said Ardi. The closer ties he was talking about included fixing the position of the board should they fall, Ardi said.

He said for each set of letters, his team attached a letter from the city's tourism and cultural agency, saying the event was a city program. But he said many officials from other agencies just ignored it.

Many of them said they would be complying with a gubernatorial decree, Ardi said.

Money wise, the four billboards cost Jakarta Biennale the most. The owners of the billboard, who happened to know some committee members, let the artists use them free of charge. The advertisement tax, however, was not waived.

"For each billboard, the tax is Rp 150 million. Meaning we should pay Rp 600 million for all. But we got 80 percent discount from the city's tax agency, so we were told to pay Rp 120 million," Ade Darmawan, Jakarta Biennale's program director said.

"The city administration gave us Rp 2 billion for the whole event. Our expenses reached Rp 3 billion," he said.

He said Governor Fauzi Bowo had verbally lent his support to Jakarta Biennale, citing the need to improve the city's creative industry.

In his speech read by his assistant for people welfare to city secretary Effendi Anas during the opening of the event on Feb. 6, Fauzi mentioned the relationship between the creative industry and potential tourism.

Head of the city's tourism and cultural agency, Arie Budhiman, recognized the need to support cultural events in Jakarta to increase tourist numbers.

"We are listing international events in Jakarta which will attract tourists - Jakarta's Java Jazz, Jakarta Fashion Week, Jakarta Great Sales,

Jakarta Biennale as well as Jakarta International Film Festival," he said on Wednesday.

He said he believed such events would help increase the number of tourists to the city. Thus it was reasonable, he said, for the events to receive tax exemptions for publication, for example.

"But for total exemption, we haven't got the regulation yet, so we need a new bylaw. Right now, the most we can do is give tax discounts," Arie said.

"From the top officials, we get support," Ade said. "But it should become a policy, not only verbal support."

The policy should also be translated into operational rules.

"This year, Jakarta Biennale received international attention. We welcomed several international press members here. And arts, we have potential big spenders who are willing to fly to see the event," Ade said.

"And Indonesia, given our interesting social and political history, we are the next big thing among international arts events."



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Stand tall: A visitor poses at National Monument (Monas) Park in Central Jakarta, where dozens of mobile photographers offer visitors service to make such pictures. Artist Daniel Kampua is displaying such pictures at Monas.