

## Heritage Workshop in George Town, Penang Island, Malaysia

Sept 19-21, 2011

MEETING THEME : "Heritage by, with and for people"

### These are Tom's rough notes

**"We need the touristy stuff, but we don't want to lose what is true and raw about George Town."**

*Ooi Geok Ling, the global tourism managing director for Penang (The New York Times)*

**George Town** : The city's beautiful picturesque streets and religious buildings are actually a map of the intricate relationships and comings and goings of ethnic origins... which created the city's form and still give life to its structures. This city is no museum.

#### Key people in the Georgetown process :

- **Veronica Liew** (Program Manager, Think City. Tee calls her "the goddess of prosperity")  
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- **Suraya Ismail** (Program Director, Think City) suraya.ismail@thinkcity.com.my
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- **Khoo Salma Nasution** (President, Penang Heritage Trust) snkhoo@gmail.com, info@pht.org.my
- **Janet Pillai** (Coordinator, Arts-Ed. This is a small NGO with its office in a rented shophouse in Cannon Street, which works on educating kids and young people in Penang about heritage. They produce beautiful brochures and books on shop houses) janetpillai@gmail.com
- **Ai Tee Goh** (She is an architect from Kuala Lumpur who works in heritage preservation - specializing in shophouses, and she also assists the Georgetown process) gohaitee@gmail.com

**Meeting Venue** : Cheah Kongsu Main Building, No. 8, Armenian Street, Georgetown.

**Veronica** : **You are all sitting in a piece of history.** This is the Cheah Clan Association ("Kongsu"), descended from the earliest Cheah clansmen who came to Panang in the 18th Century. They bought this piece of land in the 1830s. And they have very graciously allowed us to use this building - and the whole compound - for the next three days.

#### Tom's Miscellaneous Georgetown Notes :

- **This city is the way it is because of social relationships and because of people.**
- **There are 5,000 historic shophouses in George Town**, most in fairly good condition. That makes George Town the city with the largest number of historic shop houses in SE Asia (ahead of Phuket, Singapore, Malaka, etc.)
- **Historic preservation by accident** : All these shophouses are still here NOT because of any far-sighted policy or any fervent love for old buildings! It was an accidental combination of rent control laws (which made it difficult to evict tenants) and urban economic decline (which made it uneconomical to invest in Penang).
- **This is a town full of people who care passionately about what is happening to their town.**
- 2007: Georgetown "inscribed" as a World Heritage site
- Rental rates have gone up 150% - 300% since the "inscription"
- Still, 85% of the residents in Georgetown are tenants.
- **Only the facade of these historic buildings is protected by the preservation laws**, not the inside and not the people.
- **People used to hire artisans to repair and restore their houses, not architects**, so all the knowledge and control was with the families and the artisans. Since the World Heritage "inscription", the Municipal Council requires that all upgrading or restoration plans be signed by an architect, which has taken the control over these buildings out of the hands of craftsmen and people, and put it into professional hands.
- **At least 5 houses get plastered and spoiled each day.**
- **Foreigners can buy land in Malaysia.** But the sales used to be taxed heavily, making it not very economical. But a few years ago, the government removed this tax on sale of land to foreigners, to encourage foreigners to invest in Malaysia ("Malaysia my second home" program) and that was what Janet Pillai calls "the death knell" of Georgetown, since all the best houses in the city were very quickly bought up by wealthy foreigners for boutique hotels and businesses and investment.

- **Some older shop-house dwellers never leave their lane**, and many have never left Georgetown in their whole lives! But the younger generation go away to Singapore or Kuala Lumpur or abroad, and come back only when their parents start getting old and need to be looked after. And some shophouse dwellers never talk to their neighbors.

#### Anwar Fazal's opening address :

*(Anwar is the chairman of Think-City, the director of the Right Livelihood College, in the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies in Penang and an old ACHR friend). Just a few excerpts from his comments :*

- **I want to first say Salaam Ali Koum to all of you, "peace be on all of you."** The word *salam* is one of the most universal words. Here in Malaysia, we use this word morning, noon and night, to show we care for each other and to mark our empathy and spiritual connection with each other. In many communities, this kind of connection is disappearing. We no longer relate to each other or speak to each other's souls - we have only voices that are all very, very different. But peace is not only the opposite of war - peace is an everyday thing. And one of the most important things that is disappearing is that people are not even at peace with themselves.
- **Cities are getting bigger and bigger, but the whole sense of that particular city is lost**, because it's become a collection of people who don't speak to each other, don't connect with each other. And people begin to become like aliens to each other, even though they are crowded so closely together in these cities.
- **Three things we must care about** : People, people and people. We are the most powerful force that is determining the fate of the earth. If we don't understand ourselves and build up a sense of responsibility and of caring, then nothing is going to happen.
- **Gandhi's seven "Sins against Humanity"**, which we have expanded here in Penang to 11 sins! Including law without justice, rights without responsibilities, power without accountability, etc.
- **Penang is one one of those very special kind of places**, made up of a rich mix of people from all over the place. Besides the Chinese and Malays, we have South Indian Hindus, South Indian Christians and Indian Muslims. We also have German, Thai, Burmese and Bangladeshi communities in this city.
- **People's struggles never end**. What you think is a victory may the next day be changed. Every one of us as to develop a culture of constant vigilance and long-term thinking. Sometimes we say, *I've done it, it's finished*. No! The next day, a new political party comes and they change the whole thing. So it has become very important to nurture a new generation of people who share the core values of community, of caring, of making sure that we have all the kind of right values that Gandhi was talking about.
- **How do we do this? First there is the power of one:** everyone of us, if we have got something in us, keep at it and keep doing it. Then secondly, there is **the power of many**, because the world is organized in such a way that many struggles require that we network, connect and join together. That is why networks like ACHR and these community architects are so important. This coming together gives us strength. We have the spirit of community among the people who have common interest, and we have the spirit of community that transcends borders and political affiliations. And then there is **the power of information**. And finally, **the power of success** - because we must not forget the stories of where we succeeded! We don't tell those stories again, we don't use those stories to inspire us. So everywhere we have a success - even the smallest one! - we have to document it, record it, celebrate it, disseminate it, write books about it, make films and websites about it. We can also do the same thing with our failures, and thus make our failures learning lessons for us to build on.
- **Penang has always been one of those places where the one and the many connected**. Because the people who were here came from cultures from all over. Such diversity: Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Jews - and so much diversity within all these groups. That's why when you walk the streets of this town, you can feel this harmony and the energy of differences. We must continue this, and build the power of many.

#### Panel Discussion about communities and heritage in Penang :

*(Moderated by Ms. Suraya Ismail, Program Director for Think City)*

#### Welcome by Ms. Suraya Ismail (Program Director, Think City)

I am working for Think City. Before we carry on with this session, I would like to explain why we are here today, what is the purpose of this workshop, and how we might complement each others work, as we bring our community engagement and initiatives forward. Think City is a special purpose vehicle, created by Khazanah Nasional, which is the government investment arm of the Malaysian government, and the prime minister is its chairman. When Penang got the World Heritage Site status, there was an allocation of 20 million (**ringgit of US\$**) from the government, to be spread to the site, and Khazanah Nasional got these funds.

- **Think City set up in 2009 and was Malaysia's first public grants program** : In their attempt to disburse the funds as equitably and fairly as possible, they set up up Think City in 2009, which is a special public grants program. The public grants program is a method in which we believe the initiatives should come from the people and not from the government. This is a bottom-up approach to the physical, cultural, social and economic development of Penang's World Heritage Site. So all the ideas can come from the people, and

this is what we are doing no. Think City is the first public grants program in Malaysia, and in the first few months (we started 2 years ago) we were really struggling. But along the way, we found partners that helped us and nudged us in the right way.

- **In Georgetown, we now have about 70 projects for physical infrastructure, and about 20 projects for cultural and socio-economic initiatives.** The wonderful thing about the grants program is that you can ask for a grant (there is no collateral!) if your idea is good, and if your idea can bring prosperity and some improvements to the world heritage site. So what is the decision-making process in allocating these grants? We have an international expert panel, we have our board of directors, and also we have other government and non-government agencies to advise us. The board of directors (chaired by Anwar Fazal) has the final say. After taking into account all the responses from all these other entities, we hope that this is following good governance, that everyone can have a share of the program and can contribute to the development of the world heritage site.
- **This is a different way of doing development.** So far, the Think City grants program operates only within Penang's world heritage site, but in the future, it may operate in other places. BUt the main thing I want to stress is that this is a different way of doing development. This is not using banking or "return on investment." It is about rejuvenating the city culturally, socially and economically - if we can.
- **First step, understanding the situation in Georgetown: 30% of buildings are vacant and 85% of residents are tenants.** Before we do anything, we must understand the site. So during the first few months of the grants program, we did a "snap shot" survey of Georgetown. We found out that the site is hollowing out - there is 30% vacancy in the site - there are a lot of empty buildings. And we also found that 85% of the people who live in the heritage site are renting. So we understood that there is a serious threat of eviction in Georgetown, and we tried to help. In our quest to make sure that people don't get evicted from the heritage site, we face a lot of problems. Affordable housing is a must, and this is something that we should champion, as an ideology.
- **How we linked with ACHR to start the pilot project with the Armenian Street tenants :** One of the rules of the Think City initiative is that you cannot ask for a grant if you are renting - that's our policy. But when the Hok Teik Cheng Temple, the property owners on Armenian Street, asked for a grant, we went to visit the site. And we found out that the living conditions of their tenants were so bad that we said, *Look, this is not the way we do development.* It so happened at that time that Veronica had gone to Chiang Mai, with the help of Penang Heritage Trust, for ACHR's regional community architecture meeting. And we found out that this might be the way in which we help organize communities to ask for their rights to stay and live in the world heritage site, without the risk of eviction and with the security that they can still live in the heritage site - but they have to organize themselves. So that was how our pilot project with the Armenian Street tenants came about. We had a lot of discussions with the Hok Teik Cheng Temple, asking them if they could partner with their tenants, if they could be part of an initiative that does not evict people from the site, if they could fix up the houses but not increase the rent so much? This is a pilot project; we don't know whether it will work or not.
- **Expanding to several projects, with a more city-wide strategy :** Having done that, we found out, with the help of Tee, Nad and Somsok, that one project might not work well if we don't have lateral support from other communities. That's when the momentum really started, and to the first initiative on Armenian Street we added several other cases - each one different, but each one involving vulnerable communities are living under the threat of eviction as well. These cases have political connotations, they have problems of what is the best use for land, but let's solve those problems together. That's what we think we want to do now. We chose these six communities simply because we knew about them and felt they represented a variety of issues. We're new at doing this. We hope to get more communities in, because there are many other communities who have the threat of being evicted, both inside and around the world heritage site. We have started a city development fund and we are trying to make sure these communities are organized so they can fight for their rights. We hope all of you can help us and show us how to make this work. Please help us, guide us, let us learn from you. We are here for a very big purpose, and we really need these three days to be beneficial for both sides, because the threat here in Georgetown is real. It is important that we come together and try to find a fruitful solution for some of these communities.

**Presentation by Khoo Salma Nasution (President of Penang Heritage Trust).**

#### **Six community's dealing with heritage problems in different ways :**

Penang Heritage Trust is five years old, and we have made a very long journey during that time. It was started by a group of very rich people who were looking at the beautiful buildings. And we still have that kind of reputation. One of the things I have learned about conservation in European cities is that they also started with the preservation of grand buildings and monuments as physical reflections of the accumulation of their views and civilization.

- **The example of Bologna :** And then we looked at the example of the city of Bologna, in Italy, which was restored in the 1970s. At that time, Bologna had a communist mayor, and they started with improving the housing in historic areas. But the way they improved that housing was not by simply restoring the facades, but by giving people grants to improve the inside of their houses - to renovate their bathrooms and kitchens

and put in new electric wiring. The important thing was to improve people's living conditions, and by improving the services of the people who live in Bologna, the people recover their dignity and their pride in living in the old city.

- **Saving monuments versus saving vernacular neighborhoods.** This was the example that I tried to bring into the Penang Heritage Trust. Because within the heritage movement at that time, there was a kind of competition between those who wanted to invest their time and energy in saving the grand buildings and those who wanted to save the artisans and vernacular houses where ordinary people were living, which make up so much of the built fabric in historic cities. In every society, this kind of class distinction about what people feel is heritage.
- **But in Georgetown, we managed to generate enough interest in the city's shop houses and vernacular buildings.** This is a very special area, because it is where the pioneers of Penang started up. They would come through the ports and live there. Later on (before and during the second world war) the city's elite began to leave Georgetown and move out to the suburbs. So after the second world war, most of the people living in Georgetown were lower-income people who could not afford housing in the suburbs.
- **Georgetown becomes a city of low-income tenants :** And from the 1950s up to the year 2000, anybody who could afford it would just go to the suburbs. What you had left were old people, whose children had gone to Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. There was a long period of high unemployment in the 1970s, when everybody left Penang to work elsewhere. So there was also a brain drain of young people, living behind a lot of old and lower-income people - many of whom were tenants and were protected from eviction by the rent control act (put in just after the WW2, when there were lots of housing difficulties). And most subsequent governments felt it would be politically too risky to lift rent control, so they had a very inefficient rent control tribunal. So if any developer wants to come in and redevelop those houses, they have to first evict the tenants, and that involved a long process through the rent control tribunal. That made it very difficult for the developers to do anything.
- **Georgetown is saved, by default, not by any conservation plan!** Because of that rent control act, and the huge obstacles it threw in front of any efforts to redevelop the city, the old city was preserved to a large extent. And by the 1990s, we had already started recognizing that this is a heritage city and saying that it should be conserved and listed as a World Heritage Site. The government is not much interested in heritage, but they are interested in revenue from tourism, so sometimes we have to say that historic preservation is also good for tourism. That is how the government started to get involved in heritage in Georgetown, because of tourism, not as a place of cultural value for ordinary people.
- **Georgetown also contained a very big stock of decent, affordable housing.** The government of Malaysia feels that everyone should live in highrise blocks - either luxury condos or substandard high-rise housing in the periphery. So while they did begin to see the old city of Georgetown as a potential tourism cash cow, they did not see it as a stock of decent, affordable housing.
- **The end of rent control :** The Rent Control Act was repealed in 2000, many of the land-owners raised the rents and people started moving out. And even in cases where the landlords raised the rent only a little, some tenants felt insecure enough to move out anyway. There were some pockets of sympathetic landlords, like the kongsis (Chinese "clan houses"), and we began talking to these owners, asking them to not raise their rents so much - especially since most of their tenants had been living there for many generations, and the rents had only been raised in very small increments over the years. But a lot of the other private house owners have already evicted the original tenants a long time ago and are now renting to higher-income families or to tourist businesses.
- **A history of Georgetown's neighborhoods:** This town was originally a port, and so it was essentially outward-looking. And it was composed of different neighborhoods. So you have not only a little India, but a little Phuket (along Carnavon Street), a little Aceh and little Sumatra (in Leboh Aceh), and different Chinese dialect groups, all having their own neighborhoods. And in those neighborhoods, each group would have their houses of worship (temple, church, mosque), and would also have ordinary neighborhood amenities like coffee shops, sundry shops, etc. When rent control was repealed, the religious monuments and most of the religious and clan associations stayed (because they owned their own land), but people in private houses were being evicted left and right. Some of the religious associations also had tenants, and many of them also evicted their tenants.
- **We needed to respond to this situation, where so many people were being evicted.** But we also wanted to be sensitive to vulnerable religious and minority communities. In Leboh Aceh, for example, we put in a lot of work to keep the Malay community there. The community of south Indian Christians living in St. Francis Xaviers is another minority community with a very long history there. Otherwise, Georgetown would be predominantly Chinese. There were also people who were engaged in trades (making lanterns and joss-sticks) and we felt we had to spend our limited energy and attention to try to identify these endangered communities and endangered trades and try to save them and keep them in the city. Of course the developers and the bankers were much faster than us, and they have more money.
- **We are always behind, but we did try to do this cultural mapping together with Arts-Ed.** And now we have new players like Think City and World Heritage Incorporated. So at least we have more people involved now.

**About the kongsis :** The kongsis were associations which were set up primarily to assist migration. They are like guilds or cooperatives set up by migrants from certain places in China when they came here. It is very risky

to be alone in a strange place, so everybody from the Cheah surname, for example, would group together and say OK we are going to protect and help each other. If anyone dies, we make sure he gets a proper burial and that his family and widows and orphans will be taken care of. The kongsis also provided education for their members - it is a very good social institution. And the accumulated action of all these kongsis in Georgetown (there are more than 50 kongsis in the city) led to the security of the Penang Port.

- **The kongsis were like small societies within a society, but they were also merchants**, so they traded with outside ports - Sumatra, Rangoon, Phuket, with the whole region. The kongsis are overseen by trustees. Khoo Kongsi, I think, has 24 trustees. And as the trustees of most kongsis get older, they worry about how this social system is going to be sustained, now that its original purpose is diminishing, and how they are going to pass on the values of the kongsi to a new generation - values like filial piety and ancestral veneration - all the old Chinese Confucian values, basically.
- **But there are also Muslim societies with Islamic values**, other religious societies and associations with their own values, indigenous charities set up by people for the welfare of their relations and co-religionists. Georgetown is a very interesting place because it was a coming together of all these different civilizations and cultures, and all these different values and cultures have coexisted side by side for centuries.

### More on Kongsis in Georgetown

(Not from Khoo - these pink notes were copied from some wall captions in the Penang Museum): There are more than 50 Kongsis in Georgetown, many now overseen by board-members who are very old.

- **The kongsi ("clan house") was established by early Chinese immigrants to assist their clansmen from the same district or village in China (all having the same surname)**. Many of these clan houses evolved into powerful associations, providing members with welfare services, emergency funds in times of crisis as well as financial and educational assistance. The kongsis also occasionally adjudicated in settling disputes between members.
- **There are over 50 kongsis in Penang**, and many of them have histories that date back over 150 years. Most of the kongsi were built with materials brought from China, by craftsmen from China, and were typically laid out like Chinese temples, because the main ritual performed there was the worship of ancestral deities.
- **The early Chinese settlers were traders and merchants** who arrived in the late 18th century from Fukien and Kwangton Provinces in SW China. Penang was the ideal base for their commercial activities which encompassed southern China, southern Siam (Thailand), Burma and northern and western Malay states. The second wave of Chinese immigrants was in the mid 19th century, who came as indentured coolies and free laborers and petty traders and artisans, many worked in the tin mines of the Malay states.

**These kongsis are also a microcosm about what is so important about the World Heritage Site.** The WHS is important because of built heritage, living heritage and this multi-layered history and cultural diversity and cultural complexity. You could say that there is no meaning just to keep the buildings, without keeping the people and the values. But at the same time, the buildings are the hardware, and the hardware is what keeps the people (the software) together. When we got this World Heritage Listing, it was something that we all really hoped for, precisely because we felt that the state government, the national government and the local authorities were not providing that kind of protection for Georgetown. So once UNESCO recognized Georgetown as a world heritage site, only then would the government recognize it, the business community will recognize it and support it.

**The connectivity of neighborhoods in Georgetown :** When you look at the map of Georgetown, you can see the way the houses are laid out. They are not like the terraced houses that you see being built now in the suburbs, because they are perimeter blocks (??) You can walk around the blocks and you will still see activity. And this is very important for the connectivity of the neighborhoods. If you live in a shophouse in Georgetown, there are never more than 2 or 3 "degrees of separation." Because you will be living in an extended family, and you would know about 20 neighbors, and those 20 neighbors would know 1,000 people. This is what makes Georgetown the spiritual and cultural heartland of all the Penang people - some of whom are scattered all over the world! The town is also what connects us to many other regions of the world, like south Asia and southeast Asia.

### Stories from the 6 Case Study Areas :

**1. Armenian Street tenants (10 houses total in the row, but only 8 houses join the ACCA pilot project)** (this is the ACCA pilot project in Penang, in 10 houses owned by the Hok Teik Cheng Sin Temple). Two active tenants: Ms. Aswan and Mr. Liew

**Ms. Aswan ("Mary Teh") speaks :** (She is one of the 10 tenants of Armenian street, speaks in Mandarin). My name is Aswan. Three generations of my family have lived in our rented house in Armenian Street for 70 or 80 years. All the 10 houses in my group are owned by the Hok Teik Cheng Sin Temple, and we are all tenants. These 10 houses have about 35 people living in them. For the past few years, the main problem we have faced is that there is no security of tenancy any more, we just pay our rent monthly without any papers or contract or without any certainty that we will not be asked to leave some day soon.

- **We now pay about 400 Ringit (US\$130) per month in rent**, but we are afraid the rent will increase.

- **But with help from the ACHR team (Nad and Tee) we started to get together and talk about our problems**, surveyed the repairs that are needed inside our houses, with facilitation by Hooi Seam, and applied to ACHR for funding help to make these repairs. We went house by house and checked what people wanted to repair, and then prioritized the most urgent repairs first. These houses are very old, and many need a lot of work!
- **We then calculated how much these repairs would cost**, and asked local workmen to quote a price for the work. With this plan and list of priority repair projects, we determined how much we want to ask from ACCA, and how we will repay, at what interest, etc.
- **Meetings, meetings and more meetings!** Before, we never had the opportunity to talk to each other and tell each other what we think - we just pass each other on the street and say hi! So now all of us tenants meet each other and share all the time, in meetings, meetings and more meetings! We keep on meeting to work out solutions to our problems.
- **Started savings** : We opened a special bank account, with three names as co-signers, and each house now saves a certain amount of money in this shared account.
- **Field visit to Bangkok**, to visit different community-driven upgrading projects, with the help of ACHR and Think City. This trip included tenants from the 10 Armenian Street houses, and one of the trustees from the Hok Teik Cheng Sin Temple. The people in Bangkok were very surprised at this - *that the property owner went for a field trip with their tenants!* And we learned a lot and were inspired by the communities who did very crazy and successful stuff, getting leases for 30 years!

#### Tom's Armenian Street visit notes :

- The Hok Teik Cheng Sin Temple is actually a group of 5 temples, each with its own committee, and all these 5 committees have to agree, on anything to do with these ten rental shophouses they own!
- They have prioritized using the loan fund for house repairs first. Members will take loans up to a ceiling of 4,000 Ringit (US\$ 1,330) at 2.5% interest, repayable in 2-10 years.
- They are proposing to the kongsi to get a 10-year tenancy agreement, at a rent of about 400 Ringit (\$133) per month. But still no response to their proposal from the temple committee, and the people are feeling nervous about this long silence, after the friendly participation of that trustee in the Bangkok exposure visit.
- Takes a lot of meetings to deal with these internal problems. Lot of tensions between the tenants, who are all afraid of being evicted. Sometimes they have to do karaoke together to ease their tension.
- Antique cycle shop guy : He used to run a simple bicycle repair shop, like his father and grandfather, but now sells antique bicycles and other antiques, which is more profitable and more directed to the tourists. His wife is cooking porridge for the two little children in the tiny back kitchen. Shoes kept under the stair treads as we go upstairs. He is going to use a loan from the fund to repair a broken floorboards upstairs (it's very rickety up there!) and repair a leak in the roof.

## 2. Cannon Street tenants (20 houses). Khoo Kongsi evicted all their tenants and are now making over the shophouses they own into a boutique hotel.

**Khoo Salma** : They are also tenants of the Khoo Kongsi - one of the city's big kongsis. The Khoo Kongsi is one of the kongsis that converted their kongsi to tourism (maybe under pressure from the state government?), and in the 1990s, they evicted the tenants in 24 shop-houses on the lane leading into their beautiful kongsi, just off Cannon Street. But until today, they have not done anything with these empty houses. There was quite a serious confrontation between the tenants and the kongsi landlords because of that.

- **But I think we learned that for the kongsis, confrontation is not the way.** Because I think that the trustees of most kongsis want to do the thing which is best for the kongsi, and they don't always want to exploit the real estate they own on a purely commercial way. But they have a world view and different mind set - and if we can explain to them that this is sustainable, and this is better for the kongsi in the long run, it is a slow process of education. They will also come to the same conclusion and keep their tenants.
- **So this tourism idea is a double edged sword, and can be very dangerous.** You can get some benefits from tourism, but it has to be guided, and tourist development in Georgetown has been quite reckless - because it has not been guided. And people have been displaced for boutique hotels and all that.

**Mr. Fung speaks** (*he is one of the Cannon Street tenants*) I am the third generation living here, living here for the past 75 years, and my kids are the fourth generation. My grandfather moved here and rented our 2-story shop house in the 1930s, the same house we live in today. At that time, the rent was 45 Ringit (US\$15) per month. The rent has gradually increased over the years. Then when the rent control act was repealed in 2000, we were paying 300 Ringit (\$100) per month. Now we pay 550 Ringit (US\$183) per month, to the Khoo Kongsi (which is supposed to be the richest kongsi in George Town, with the most land and buildings under their ownership -but with 40 trustees, all very old), which first started giving us 2-year rental agreements, but recently - *wow!* - they started giving us only a 1-year rental agreement. Some of the tenants in our line of shop houses have no agreement at all. This means that if the owner wants back the house, they can take it any time. But after living here for so many years, we feel that this place is a very wonderful place, and although it's not our house technically, it is our house in the heart - I keep it tidy and clean, I repair it.

- **Repair problems** : Of course there are some problems like roof leaking, termites, ageing structure. Also we face a traffic problem, with big lorries and buses passing on our small narrow street. So we gathered

together and talked about how to block the big lorries from coming in to this small lane. So this is a very good start. We have to play a role in this community, and all of us must play a part, or else nothing can work out.

### 3. Acheen Street Flea Market vendors

**Khoo Salma** : The flea market is connected to the Chew Jetty, because the Chew Jetty was the stopover for Burmese boats, and they would come in to barter and trade. They couldn't get bicycles or any other machines inside Burma, so they would bring in raw rubber and trade it for simple machines and tools and stuff like that. These Burmese boatmen would come off the Chew Jetty and walk straight down Armenian Street to that corner with Acheen Street, where there is a little park, and do their bartering and trading there.

- **The flea market was originally in another place (Lorong ??),** and was evicted from that place. So those flea market traders came to Armenian Street, and that's why you have a flea market since that time, which was about 10 or 15 years ago.
- **These flea market vendors don't live here, they just trade here.** But we realized that to protect this flea market site is to protect the people, because it is the people who are the living heritage and the ones who sustain the culture and sustain the festivals, etc.

**Mr. Ah Loon speaks** (*he is one of the flea market vendors. He speaks in Mandarin, and Hooi Seam translates*) Thanks to everyone here who is coming to help and coming with your ideas. Our flea market has been running every evening for about 20 years, in an open space at the corner of Acheen Street and Armenian Street, which used to be a park.

- **A cat and mouse game with the Municipal Council** : Some of the tenants in houses around the market (many high-end art galleries, not original shophouse tenants), as well as the Rotary Club next-door (also on municipal land) have complained. And the municipal council stopped us from running our businesses for a while, after there had been some complaints about the flea market. After that, it was like a cat and mouse game between the vendors and the municipal workers - when the council people came with their trucks and their enforcement staff to shoo us away, we would run and gather up all our goods quickly and wait on the sides for them to leave, and then spread out our goods again.
- **Help comes** : One day I was surprised when Aswan (who is a vendor and a tenant in Armenian Street) said somebody wants to help. And it was true! Tee was here at that time, and Nazurah was the facilitator for the flea market. I am one of the committee of vendors at the flea market.
- **What the city complained about and how we responded by regulating ourselves** : The city said some of us were selling pirated and pornographic videos and stolen goods. They also said the parking on the street created traffic jams and there was also lots of garbage generated by the market. *No good!* So with some guidance from Hooi Seam and Nazurah, we came together, formed an internal committee (which meets every Sat morning) and started setting up our own layout plan for the market, in which everyone had an equal space (each stall is 4x8 feet), and rules for the flea market, to answer the city's complaints. 10 rules for the flea market : no selling of blue or pirated films, no littering, no blocking of traffic with carts and bicycles and vending, no selling of illegal items, no renting out of space in the market to outsiders, etc. We even allotted 14 stalls especially to former drug addicts, to help them find their way back to normal life.
- **We presented our plan and rules to the Council in Aug 2011, and used it to negotiate permission to continue.** They gave us a 2-weeks trial period - and that time is long over now, and the council has not stopped us! *Now it's very good!* No traffic problems, no litter! We have a team that comes and cleans up the park every night after the flea market, and if you go over there now, you will find everything nice and clean! And when word got out that we were going to get legal licenses to have the market, more vendors started coming, but we had to stop the list at 300 vendors - this was difficult, because we want to be inclusive, but we have to limit our members because of the small space, and some new vendors cannot come here, because there is no room. And we have also had to limit it to Malaysian citizens, no vendors from outside the country.
- **The relations with the city have improved a lot now!** The local assembly guy came and saw how we had transformed the market, and he was very impressed. We still have no formal license to vend
- **Now we have a t-shirt for the vendors!** We have the idea to change our image from a "thieves market" to a "green market" selling recycled items, so we have a t-shirt to publicize this new concept. *"Go green, keep green!"* Alice's brother Gan designed it for us (he is Indian, but speaks Hokien!).

### 4. St. Francis Xavier's tenants:

**Khoo Salma** : The land under this church and all its surrounding buildings was a very old Catholic endowment, where the land was given for the church, and for housing members of the Catholic faith, as well as for housing the Catholic poor. But sometimes the head of the church may have different ideas about how to use that land. We face this situation in Penang Heritage Trust all the time, where we have to argue for cultural and social value over purely economic value. On this land, there is the church, there is the Catholic section of the Christian cemetery, there is an orphanage, the light-house charity and some houses which are still mostly occupied by low-

income Catholics, of South Indian ancestry, who have been living there and serving the church for generations. This is one of Penang's cultural minorities.

**Mr. Johnson** (*he is a Tamil Christian, a carpenter and a tenant in the St. Francis Xavier Church compound*)

There is a big and very old church at the center of our village, and beside the church is an equally old Catholic cemetery. We also have an orphanage there, and I am one of the thousands of children who grew up in that orphanage over the past hundred years. We had a Tamil and English school there also, but that school was closed. This is our village, with two rows of houses, in an L shape, facing onto an open space.

- **Now the church wants this land where our houses are.** They say they want to do charity. We talked to the Bishop many times, many people have come to help us stay there, we've asked them, we've begged them to stay, and our struggle to stay has appeared in the newspaper. Finally we don't know what to do, we don't see any progress. And we're all still scared, every day, that we are going to lose the houses where we have lived for generations. Every day the church people come and tell us you have to leave this site, you cannot stay here. For three years, they have refused to take our rent, and then they blame us for not paying the rent. Finally I told my colleagues it's better that we stop begging, stop trying to see the bishop, and better we join together and offer our problem to God. And I feel now that God is in all of you to help us.
- **We all grew up in this little south Indian village in the middle of Georgetown :** (*showing slides of the houses*) Mr. Das, Mr. Muttu - these are all people who live there. They were all born there and have lived there all their lives, for three generations. It was a nice, small south Indian village. A very beautiful village. If you go to that place, you'll be surprised to see such a charming little village in the middle of a big town! These are our houses.
- **Eviction already started and some houses have been demolished :** Before, they were all in good conditions, but after they asked us to leave, some old persons were scared when the church threatened to send in security agents to demolish the houses. And so some took the compensation the church offered and moved away, otherwise they felt they wouldn't get anything if they stayed. And the moment they left, the church security people came and removed the roof, so nobody else would come and stay there. And now everything is quite broken down and sad.
- **We are still sharing one toilet.** But this is very inconvenient, so old people have to come from their houses at night, to use the toilet. And even outsiders come and use the toilets and sometimes they take drugs there, so we have to watch out.
- **Land-sharing plan :** Since the Bishop said he wants to do this "charity work" using our land, we have decided to give part of the land back to the Bishop, for his charity work, and keep the small part where one of the rows of old houses still stands, intact. So the three people still living in the Bishop's part can move into the three houses on our part which are now empty, where people have moved away. It's a very simple solution, and we hope the Bishop will agree to our plan.

## 5. Clan Jetty communities :

**Khoo Salma :** *The jetties are like wooden villages built on stilts right over the water.* Originally, these were the stevedores and ferry-men who unloaded the ships in the harbor and serviced the big ships in different ways. There were also fishermen. Each jetty is identified with a different surname - all of them Hokian Chinese. They were also working with the big Kongsis (a kongsi is an association. It also means to share, and also means a company). The big kongsis were the big import-export merchants in Georgetown, and the people who lived in the jetties and worked on the jetties were an integral part of this import-export trade.

- **We are working so far with two jetties:** Cheu Jetty and Yeo Jetty.

**Hooi Seam :** For many years, each of the clan jetties have formed their own committees, and recently they formed an overall committee of representatives from all the seven (**or only six?**) remaining clan jetties (there used to be more - one got evicted and demolished). This committee is trying to look at the whole clan jetty area as a whole and work together to save their very old communities, which are under serious threat.

**Ms. Cheu Sin Ping speaks** (*she is a young generation resident of the Cheu Clan Jetty*) Currently we are left with only six clan jetties, where people of the same surname live. So in our jetty, 99% of the people living there are named Cheu, and most of us are related. We have just lately formed a village development and city committee to take care of the whole clan jetties and also to discuss issues about the development of the jetties.

- **Big problem of old electric wiring :** This committee has made proposals to the state government for assistance to improve the lights and electric wiring - two years ago we had a fire in Cheu Jetty caused by old wiring, and some houses burned down. After that, we set up a special committee to take care of the fire brigade and fire response. We are quite concerned about the old wiring, which is especially dangerous in a community of wooden houses. A lot of wires hang from the pole and pass through the roof of your house on the way to someone else's house! And sometimes we see the sparks. One time in our house, a monkey got inside the house and pulled some of the wires, so we saw sparks and that caused a little fire.
- **The problem of occupation licenses :** We are still holding "temporary occupancy licenses", instead of leasehold or freehold documents. We have to renew these temporary licenses every year, and if we don't renew, the government has the right to take over our house. So the way many of you feel worried about eviction - we also feel that! For the past 30 years - my whole life - we have been interviewed by government



people four times, asking us how many people are living in our house and how much do we want to be compensated to leave our jetty? So we have had to live with that kind of threat.

- **But I was born there, and I love that place.** The feeling of living on the clan jetties is totally different than the rest of the city. Once you step in to the jetty, you will feel the peace of that place, and feel that you are out of the stress of work and the city, you just sit there facing the sea, you throw away all that stress. If you have time to go there, you should see the clan jetties and experience that. When I was young, I told my friends at school that I live on the sea. Then they say you must be joking: local people in Penang don't know about the clan jetties.
- **The clan jetties were not on the tourism map:** When we saw the Malaysia tourism map, the clan jetties were not there at all! When we asked them why not, they said we couldn't promote us because they are quite dirty!
- **The problem of trash and toilets :** Back then, we didn't have any trash collection, and people didn't know to throw all their trash in the rubbish bin. So they kept throwing everything into the sea - this we really have to admit! But now we have allocated a rubbish bin for every household, so nobody dumps their garbage into the sea any more. But there is still a lot of garbage that floats in from the sea, and collects under the jetties. Another problem is the sewage system, which really needs to be improved (most houses still have toilets that flush straight into the sea below!). Although we are listed under the UNESCO World Heritage Site, if we don't take good care of the place, the image to outsiders will be very bad. I do hope that the meeting can help us with some ideas about how to solve this sewage problem, which is very important.

## 6. Kampung Kuala, Jalan Bahru, Balik Pulau

### Balik Pulau means "at the back of the island"

**Mr. Edward Tun speaks** (*He is a resident in the roadside Kampung Kuala settlement, on the Jalan Bahru Road, in Balik Pulau*) People in my village call me "Ah Tun", nobody calls me Edward. There are 110 households in our village. We have all stayed in this village for more than five generations, since the end of the 19th century. Back then, it was all paddy fields around here. And our kampung was built along the river, and was like a mini Socho, and quite unique. Before, many of our families were fishermen and farmers, but now only 10 households are still fishing. And many of the young generation have left.

- **Big development planned with 1,000 up market houses :** But now a developer wants to develop a big up market housing development, on a huge 20-hectare piece of land along our road, with about 1,000 terraced houses, single detached houses and flats. We all feel quite sad about this, and 31 houses in our kampung are affected by this project, they have already got eviction letters from the project's lawyer. Four houses got scared and have already taken the compensation and moved out.
- **The big project seems to be cursed!** This was all farmland before, but in the 1990s, they got the land converted to residential, and the new project was approved in about 2004. But there has been a lot of buying and selling of the land since then, and the contractors keep changing. The first developer died of a heart attack. The second developer got cancer. The third developer went bankrupt. The 4th developer had to be bailed out by the central government funds but couldn't finish. *Maybe the god over there is helping us - this is what my father says!* But the 5th developer is a big, listed company and they seem to have the clout to really finish the project. And they don't talk to us, don't tell us anything.
- **We want to stay there, if possible.** We are just starting to organize ourselves in 2007, formed a committee and are trying to develop a plan. I am the committee secretary and I need to do a lot of hard work, everybody relies on me, so I have a lot of tension! But it's hard to get people involved, since most are not directly affected by this project, but all of us are in danger of being evicted. None of us have any papers which give us land ownership. Maybe we can negotiate a kind of land-swapping agreement, so everyone can stay. Not clear yet.

### Reflections and suggestions after site visits to the 6 areas :

#### 1. Reflections / Suggestions on Armenian Street Tenants :

- (*Ruby from Philippines*) The people are very kind to repair their rental houses. Good that they have started savings! Idea: Don't look at the savings as money only, but as a tool and a system to organize people, to make the people come together and to help them become stronger to address the tenure problem.
- (*Lim Jee Yuan from Penang*) This helps us to appreciate what we still have! I was very impressed with the community spirit in Armenian Street and by the willingness of the kongsi to take part in this experimental project. And I think it is important to acknowledge that the kongsi has not increased the rents as much as others in the same street, where some houses are now renting for 1,500 Ringit per month.
- **Suggestions :** Organize a celebration of "80 years in Armenian Street" with street fair, food, invite the board members of the Kongsi, and use the event to make relations more friendly with the kongsi, in a more festive setting. Make more projects which allow the tenants to work together, instead of only separately on their own house repairs - like a common playground for children out front, or some communal activities. Organize more regular meetings and gatherings, to break the isolation of the 10 tenants. Join with the other tenant

groups more regularly for sharing and support. Suggest to make the savings group more flexible, allowing people to save whatever they can, no minimum savings amount, and find creative ways to use the extra savings to start new businesses, etc.

## **2. Reflections / suggestions on Cannon Street Tenants :**

- *(Ruby from Philippines)* They have very good houses, good jobs and good money. The only problem is the secure tenure problem. Now trying to make a strong voice together and renegotiate their rental status.
- *(Lajana from Nepal)* Your kongsi system is very much like our system of "Guti" neighborhood or caste associations in Nepal. Our temples and courtyards and rest places are all built and maintained by the local guti. I propose that we organize an exchange between the Nepali Gutu and the Penang kongsi. But our guti system has crumbled, so we learn from you!

## **3. Reflections / suggestions on Acheen Street Flea Market :**

- **Suggestions :** Build a network with other flea markets around Penang, to support each other and give each other ideas. Start a savings group among the vendors, with perhaps a minimum saving of 1 Ringit per day. Upgrade the market by using tables instead of on the ground, or make nice recyclable bags for sale with the market logo on them.

## **4. Reflections / suggestions about the eviction at St. Francis Xavier's:**

- *(Somsook)* This is eviction by the bishop. He won't talk to the people, he says "See my lawyer!" This is about business, not about the families, and not about faith or spirituality at all. And these families are all very close to the church, some of them have had jobs to take care of the garden, clean the buildings, etc. But it should be possible to negotiate a land-sharing plan, which is quite a good idea for this case.
- *(Nikil from India)* The people have already spoken with the Bishop, who doesn't want to negotiate. Idea is very good one to make a land-sharing plan, with proper drawings and a clear concept, and use this to go back to negotiating with the Bishop. This is our homework to help prepare these schematic drawings with you. And we have to get more people involved in this struggle, so it's not just this tiny community versus this powerful Bishop. It's too lonely with only 7 families are fighting alone! First you can talk to the other Catholic parishioners and priests, maybe launch a signature petition to get support for your staying, set up a Facebook page to gain support for your cause, and to put pressure on the bishop.
- *(Somsook)* That land was donated to the church by a private land-owner, during the British times, to be used for houses for the poor. Now it seems that that land is not any longer for the poor but is owned by the Bishop. But this is a church, not a property developer! The church is supposed to provide protection for the community of its parishioners and for the poor. But this is a more business way of thinking, not a holy way of thinking!
- *(Gregor from Germany)* There are only 7 families left here now - need to gather much broader support for them, because they cannot win this struggle by themselves.
- **Suggestions:** Start the dialogue with the bishop again, prepare documents which prove long tenancy here, develop land-sharing plan with young architects, record oral history of remaining community members, include this group of tenants in a city-wide tenants platform of support and learning, petition the Bishop (but this may backfire by offending him). Also a suggestion to pay the rent arrears into a formal bank account, with a lawyer, so nobody can accuse the people of not paying the rent.
- *(Haji Asan from Penang)* By law they own the land, so if we fight by the law, we don't have a leg to stand on and we will lose, definitely! But if we negotiate by improving the buildings - and these little houses are actually "Category 2" historic listed buildings! - it becomes a movement. Rather than fight legally, we can persuade the bishop with alternatives and with persuasion and reason.

## **5. Reflections / suggestions on the Clan Jetties :**

- *(Aneela from Pakistan)* There is still such a strong community sense of identity in these close-knit jetties. The question for professionals like us is how to help improve the living conditions - especially the electricity and sewerage - without changing the quality of the houses and walkways.
- **Suggestions :** Look for sources of the floating garbage and alert the city. Make a detailed map of the infrastructure problems in all the jetties with local students and use this map to develop an integrated system for improving the infrastructure in the jetties - especially the sewers and the wiring. Should be technical solutions to these problems, and possible to develop these improvements inexpensively, where everyone shares, instead of waiting for the government to do.

## **6. Reflections / suggestions on the Balik Pulau eviction :**

- *(Boram from Korea)* In Korea, there are also many poor tenants with no voice, and the government makes many redevelopment projects in which the poor tenants have no power to say what happens in their neighborhood, no voice. By the time of redevelopment, it's too late to make that voice, the situation is too serious. Better to prepare before the problems happen. And for that, I think it's important to do many community activities which bring people together and get them thinking and planning together, before the eviction actually happens.
- **Suggestions :** It is always a problem when one community leader is doing all the work, and the others don't join and he's ready to give up! So suggestions to collect more information about the community and use

that collection to draw more people into the process - info about the history of the settlement, documents about history of tenancy. Suggest to form sub-groups of 5 or 6 households to plan alternatives in smaller groupings, to get people thinking about the possibilities for land-swapping or reblocking - sometimes people are much more comfortable and ready to participate in smaller subgroups, where they might just stand back silently in big groups. Think of the planning of alternatives as part of the negotiation to stay. Share experiences with other vulnerable tenant groups in the city. Start a community savings group and try to get all 110 families involved, but start with the 31 families facing eviction. The savings can be used to give loans to upgrade the houses, start small businesses or build new houses.

#### **Reflections and suggestions for the whole town of George Town :**

- **Suggestion :** Expand the community savings process to all the six pilot communities, and to other vulnerable tenant communities, and set up a city-wide fund to help finance repairs by tenants. Strengthen the networking between the six pilot communities and expand to new areas, so more spread, more reach and more variety of cases.

**Somsook : The social wealth that still exists here in George Town :** We have visited several pockets around Georgetown and I am so impressed that the structure of community is still so much alive here in Penang - you are very lucky! The kongsis, the St. Francis Xavier's Church, the Malay mosques - these systems link people together in different ways. In other Asian cities, these kinds of social structures are all gone now, and they have become cities of isolated individuals, who go home every night to their apartments and lock the door. Nobody knows their neighbors - you could die in your little box-like apartment and nobody would know!

- **In Georgetown, this social wealth still exists, but now these marvelous community structures are under threat.** 85% of the city are renters - that is a very serious and shaky situation! There is no clear policy any longer to protect them, no clear mechanism for how to deal with these conflicts. There are only rules which deal with how to preserve the houses and the facades, and the pressures to develop the city commercially for tourists and bring in the money. Is that what we want for Georgetown, to become a city of foreign hotels and bars?
- **But these tenants all want to stay!** People are attached to their communities in this city, even if they may be living in small houses with leaky roofs and termites eating away at the beams. They are suffering as they see their city being taken away from them, but they don't know what to do. And the system doesn't know what to do either, to keep this from becoming a city which belongs to others.
- **The legal system replaces human relationships :** In the past, the landlords stayed together with the tenants very peacefully and naturally - it was the same pattern we saw in so many Asian cities. Back then, the legal aspects of the landlord-tenant relationship were not so prominent as the human aspects of the relationship. But as the legal system has gotten stronger, then the one who is the legal owner of the land starts thinking like the market, and those beautiful old human relationships get pushed aside.
- **How to find a more compromising, balanced way to develop the city,** with more continuity of these very old, very rich communities which are still here? So the city's economic development and the life of the people can go together, can be a more interactive process, a more balanced process? How can we keep from selling our soul for money?
- **We need to create a system so renters can get access to finance,** to repair their houses and to do other activities. How we find the answer to this will come out of this absence.
- **People are the living heritage in George Town.** It's not only the heritage from the past, and the physical heritage of old buildings! The people, the history and the physical all go together - we see this so clearly in this town! There is still a lot to think about and we pledge ourselves to support you in your struggle - including St. Francis Xavier's!

#### **MOU Signing, between Think City and ACHR, to set up a CDF in George Town :**

**Somsook :** ACHR is a network of people and groups around the Asia region. We are very happy to be part of your development here in Penang. Sometimes in our efforts to develop our cities, we forget our people, we forget the poor, we forget the people who built the city and the people who built the development process at the same time. And then that urban development becomes more segregated and unbalanced, with more poor people, fewer rich people and greater disparities between the two.

- **Heritage is a new issue for ACHR :** This is the first time for our friends from ACHR to experience a heritage site like this one, and we are really very thankful to all of you that we are able to learn. The story here in Georgetown is not that different from other cities, where the poor are being excluded from their cities, and many of the principals are similar, but the way in which we can find a solution in this beautiful old city, together, may be quite different.
- **But we are very happy to be a part of your process,** to be a part of the renters here, who speak so well and are so inspiring to us! We are with you!
- **If we can understand how people's strength and creativity could be the central force in their city's development, then we can find ways to link the past and the present together.** Otherwise, the strange kind of development that is happening in our Asian cities - both historic cities and ordinary cities - is just commercial urban development - it's not the development for the people and by the people, as it used to.

Because our Asian cities were all built by people who lived there, built by their cultures and built by the interactions between the different people and cultures in that city.

- **This meeting is an interaction between friends in Asia.** We are very happy to be part of your process here in Penang, and we're learning a lot from all of you. And we'd like to keep working together, keep contributing whatever we know, and keep searching together for the right answer to the problems you're facing here in George Town - and in other heritage cities - to build with the people a new knowledge, a new momentum in Asia's urban heritage movement. Heritage is so important! It is the way we preserve our culture, our history, our civilization and our roots. Without it, our new cities have nothing to do with Asian culture any longer. But the question for us is how to develop our heritage process in an Asian way, in ways which give space for the ordinary people who created our cities to be the main part, for that is the only way we can bridge the past, the present and the future together. When I see the kind of process that you are undertaking here today, it makes me believe that we are going to find the right answer. Thank you very much.

### **DAY 3 : International Group Discussion about George Town**

**Point : The poor are the carriers of culture,** and poor cities are often the ones that retain their cultures (witness Venice, Georgetown, Hoi Anh).

**Point : The thing which connects the buildings and physical artifacts with the history is PEOPLE.**

**Debashish (Ahmedabad) : This is the strategy we used in Ahmedabad :**

- Politics want the people to stay there in the old city, because they are the vote bank.
- We reduce the FSI (Floor square index, the planning rules which regulate height and density of buildings) to 1.8 in the old city, to control density and make it impossible to build high-rises.
- We focus first on improving public spaces and public amenities, so then people will automatically start restoring their houses. Don't start on the houses first.
- Finally, we support the house restoration with technical help - in Ahmedabad, most of it is paid for by the residents.
- We have to see heritage areas like Ahmedabad's old town as a very large stock of affordable and flexible housing for a variety of people. If people leave this old town, there is no life, no city, no reason to go there!

**Younus (Pakistan) : The importance of making sure people know what projects their city governments are planning :** Governments always have many plans to develop cities - both historic and otherwise - but what effect will these plans have on the people who live there? People need to know what their government is thinking and planning. Foreign investors are now coming into our cities and our local governments are setting plans and projects with them which nobody knows about - flyovers, highways, infrastructure, housing developments, etc. And these projects are causing lots of evictions. The URC's approach is to try to find ways of finding out what these projects are being planned - as early as possible - and then make sure people know and can discuss these plans, long before they face eviction.

**Nad : Suggests establishing a special sub-network of heritage cities :** Now ACCA is working in 18 or 19 countries, and all these countries have historic cities, or cities with historic parts - not only Penang. Suggests establishing a special network of these "heritage" cities, as a kind of sub-network among the Asian cities, to share ideas and learn from each other.

**Somsook : Heritage has to link with both the grassroots side and the research/professional side:**

Heritage is one issue of city-wide upgrading, because when we talk about city-wide upgrading, we are focusing on housing for the poor *in the whole city*. But heritage for what? For professionals? For architects? If this network of heritage cities could link with the people's groups and people's movements in those cities, so they can be involved in understanding these issues in their cities, along with the professionals and activists.

- **Invites groups to send proposals for action research on these heritage cities :** Action research in your cities - we have a small budget from ACCA to support this kind of research. So many cities have heritage issue, like Phuket, Chiang Mai, Phnom Penh, Battambang, Siem Reap, etc. But not study for study's sake, but study and use the knowledge to work with poor people and bring them into the process. We

**Aneela (Pakistan)** Suggests doing more case studies in other Southeast Asian cities, to compare with Penang.

**Maurice : But we don't want to make a special heritage section!** Heritage is just one of many issues which affect city-wide upgrading and housing for the poor in Asian cities. Whatever we do with this heritage issue has to be integrated with our work with the poor and with our fundamental focus on finding ways for the poor to be the key doers and the key actors in bringing about change in their settlements and cities.

**Debashish (Ahmedabad)** Shows us some dummy copies of "Healing Heritage" brochures he is preparing for printing, which document parts of the old city, show stories about restoring old houses, documents certain

restoration projects with lots of beautiful photos and drawings and profiles of the people who live there, who do the craftwork, etc. (*Nad has a copy of the dummy*)

**Shuji (Japan) :** *We need to know understand more clearly what are the rights of the tenants and the owners,* and the laws which control tenancy agreements, here in Penang.

**Kreangkrai (Thailand, Silpakorn University) :** *Suggests doing more research into the vernacular architecture in other port cities in Southeast Asia.*

- **Restoring old shop houses in Bangkok :** He describes some of the projects to restore 19th Century shop-house neighborhoods in Bangkok, which are also houses occupied by tenants, on land owned by the Crown Property Bureau. So far, these restoration projects are done by "elite" groups or by the government, and so far, there are few examples of restoration of historic shop houses by the people themselves. But there is a new movement and a new trend to restore these old shophouses. The Crown Property Bureau owns many of the city's surviving stock of 19th Century shophouses, and they have some budget to help tenants restore these old buildings, and new methods to deal with owners (?). This movement to preserve these old houses and shophouse neighborhoods (many of which are very lively neighborhoods and still occupied by old shopkeepers), involves research studies, information and data collection.

**Nad :** *A lot of research is kept private, not shared, not open.* This question of studies and research in heritage areas is very important! In Penang, we found there are so many studies, so many research papers and documents on Georgetown. But we found that many of the researchers and institutions don't allow us to see them!

**Debashish (Ahmedabad)** *Living in a historic city is not so romantic as the tourist brochures say!* There are 12,000 listed buildings in the old city of Ahmedabad. Very few of those buildings are tourist boutiques and gift shops - many of them are occupied by ordinary people, many quite poor, and the infrastructure is still quite bad, lots of evictions of tenants, etc. The reality of living in an old heritage city like Ahmedabad is not romantic at all, not like the tourist brochures show!

**Nad :** *Suggestions for building a cluster network on the heritage issue in city-wide upgrading :*

- New network and website (maybe based here in Penang?)
- Link together ACCA pilot projects in heritage cities, around city-wide upgrading issue
- Reach out to new groups in heritage areas of new cities, and follow up with support (maybe ACCA projects?)
- Maybe a special issue of the ACHR newsletter on heritage issue, based on the presentations from this meeting? (the stories would include info about what is the strategy? How the projects engage with the people? How the project worked? What were the "soft solutions"?)

**Nad :** **The importance of food in human exchanges:** Whenever we had meetings with the Armenian Street tenants, Aswan would always cook something for us and invite everyone to eat! We started with the eating, and the discussion would start naturally and informally from there. That may be why Aswan sounds a little annoyed when she describes this organizing process as only "Meeting, meeting, meeting!" This is important because most of these people never met each other much at all before, never talked! And if you ask people to come have a meeting to discuss these big, scary issues of eviction and house repairs, it's not a very attractive idea, everyone is nervous, and shuts up! But once they start eating something delicious, and eating it together, it is a kind of trick to loosen the heart's strings, and the talk just starts. And there is a lot of history and heritage in the dishes she prepared for us, too - as much heritage as in the shophouse!

- **Suggests organizing a festival of "80 Years on Armenian Street"** - Nad revives the earlier suggestion that the Armenian tenants organize a festival to celebrate their 80 years of living in Armenian street, and make this festival a chance to let each family prepare their history and their story, and then invite everyone to come and eat!