

Semarang is first city in Asia to be included in e-book series

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THE JAKARTA POST/SEMARANG

Belgian publisher deBuren has picked Central Java capital Semarang as the first city in Asia to be included in its online series entitled *Citybooks*.

Widya Mitra Cultural Foundation head Widjajanti Dharmiwijono told *The Jakarta Post* the cities included in *Citybooks* were mostly those in Europe, Africa and the US.

Citybooks contains stories, essays or poems that can be read, listened to and accessed for free through the website *citybooks.eu*.

"Semarang is the first city in Asia [to be included in the series]. Why Semarang? Because the city is home to the unique Kota Lama [Old City], which is full of historical heritage sites, as well as a unique community that cares about Kota Lama," said

Widjajanti.

She acknowledged she was very proud when Semarang was picked for the series, so the city could be further promoted to the world.

Indonesia also has lots of cities with unique areas left by the Dutch, but the most unique community concerned with the local area is found in Semarang.

"We are very grateful to Erasmus Taalcentrum, Erasmuis Huis, the Royal Dutch Embassy and deBuren," said Widjajanti.

The Semarang book launch was held recently at Noeri's Cafe in Kota Lama. Writers, photographers and videographers involved in the Semarang e-book were present to show their work.

The website includes 17 chosen cities: Bucharest in Romania; Charleroi, Ghent, Ostend and Turnhout in Belgium; Chartres in

France; Grahamstown and Stellenbosch in South Africa; Graz in Austria; Lublin in Poland; Semarang in Indonesia; Sheffield in the UK; Skopje in the Republic of Macedonia; Tbilisi in Georgia; Utrecht in the Netherlands; Venice in Italy and Yerevan in Armenia.

Every city is a tourist destination because they are home to ancient buildings that have been maintained, the history of which can still be benefitted from today.

Semarang's edition is written in four languages — Dutch, English, French and Indonesian. Especially for Semarang, 2,000 copies of the book have been printed in Dutch and Indonesian and distributed to the community for free.

The Semarang book contains stories and images from a number of writers and artists. One of them is a 24-minute video by videographer

and cinematographer Rizki Lazuardi. "The video contains activities in Semarang city and its residents around the clock," said Rizki.

The key criteria that determined the selection of artists is diversity. Writer Bouke Billiet from Flanders in Belgium, for instance, had never visited a tropical country, while his colleague from the Netherlands, Gustaaf Peek, is of Indonesian descent.

Tubagus P. Svarajati, former swine breeder and art gallery manager, was born and raised in Pecinan (Chinatown), while young writer Candra Dewi Dian Puspitasari has always lived in Semarang and has admired the city. Triyanto Triwikromo, a journalist and poet, wrote a poetic text on Semarang's history.

Tubagus related a story of his family titled "*Lee Hwa*".

"The story is about my family, but actually I took pictures of the entire

area in Pecinan," Tubagus said.

Triyanto Triwikromo wrote poetry about the beginnings of Semarang from the arrival of Admiral Cheng Ho in 1413.

Meanwhile, Billiet expressed his admiration for the sense of tolerance of Semarang's residents in writing "*Meisje van vroeger*" (Palm Leaves and Truth). There are many big and small mosques equipped with loud speakers for the dawn call to prayer at around 5 a.m. He eventually came to an understanding about the various faiths in Indonesia and the diverse ethnic groups living on 17,000 islands.

Photographer Dadang Pribadi claimed it was not too difficult for him to choose photo subjects relating to Semarang.

"There are 24 photographs that are all a series on storytelling. Obviously, I'm happy that I could con-

tribute something for Semarang," he said.

The photos feature the atmosphere in Kota Lama, fishermen at sea, a number of stage performances, young puppeteers and other photos.

Separately, Semarang residents also expressed their excitement after their city was included in the *Citybooks* series.

"I'm very happy Semarang will be further known to the world. This is a good start with the setting of Kota Lama, which has become an icon of Semarang," said Andang Prasetya, a Semarang native.

Jeanny, who hails from Jakarta but currently resides in Semarang, said she was surprised that Semarang was chosen by *Citybooks*.

"However, as I have become a Semarang resident now, I am also proud of it," she said.

Jakarta Post 12 november 2013