

# Diversity in Harmony

## Multi-ethnic Architectural Conservation in an ex Colonized country

### Semarang, Indonesia case

植民地時代の名残をとどめる建築遺産を壊すべきではない。その遺構を持つ植民地主義のみを廃して、旧宗主国への「平和の大使」にするのだ。

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#### Abstract

Since the proclamation of Indonesian independence on August 17th 1945, this new nation has taken as its motto: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which means “Plural but One, Unity in Diversity.” This concept infiltrates all aspects of every Indonesian’s life. This concept should infiltrate any Indonesian city as the place where Indonesian peoples’ lives take place. Semarang as an Old Indonesian city has a long history and nowadays it is time for a heritage building conservation movement.

As a city in a formerly colonized country, Semarang faces challenges in doing architectural conservation such as the decline of the Kota-lama as the heritage area with the consequences that many of the heritage buildings are threatened with a construction collapse. In Semarang, the bad impact is being doubled with the rising of the sea level (Rob) that submerges the heritage area in seawater. The next problem is that the heritage building lies in a prospective area where economic runs high. This threatens some heritage buildings that lie there. To get around the laws of conservation, owners of some of those heritage buildings employ “intentionally decaying strategies” to make their own heritage building collapse.

As a formerly colonized city, Semarang grew into a colonial paradigm called “*Divide et impera*.” The city is divided into several zones based on the difference of the ethnicity. The city developed “Pelandan,” “Pecinan,” “Kauman,” Pekojan” (the Dutch, the Chinese, the Indonesians, the Kojas) districts. Until now, the conservation movement focuses on the Kota-lama—Little Nederland and on Semawis—a community-based conservation effort in a formerly Chinese community area. The city’s residents and the government seem to forget the traditional Javanese area Alun-alun & Kanjengan, Djohar market, Kauman and Pekojan. But recently a positive movement has appeared: some communities have organized themselves and arranges many special and traditional events, for example, at Kampung Bustaman, Warak ngendog festival, Dhug Dher festival and others. By organizing all the capacity of the many layers, many ethnicities of all the city’s residents, we can prove that we can break the divider that built this nation history, and turn it into a fruitful campaign towards a prosperous community, an architectural conservation that embraces all communities and covers all the heritage area, developing an amazing heritage tourism through the old city. This displays the spirit of “Unity in Diversity” towards “Diversity in Harmony,” precisely, as our founding-fathers have planned for us.

**Keywords** Multi ethnics, Semarang city conservation, heroic conservation, conservation in a formerly colonized country

## Introduction

A city is an artifact as a product of the long history of the city. Semarang as an old city had a long history too, and the whole architecture of Semarang and its districts and regions reflects the path of that history. So every part of Semarang city has its own values and share the whole Semarang's history. That is why the paradigm and policy of the Semarang's conservation has to cover all historical district and regions in Semarang. So far nearly everybody and every effort and energy—from the government, the art community, the press, universities, many foundations (many in cooperation with Dutch's foundations)—have been poured in to lift up and promote “Kota-Lama” as an formerly colonial district. While Pecinan's community as the inhabitants of the Chinese district, by their community-based self-supporting effort has successfully arranged the Semawis bazaar on each Friday through Sunday nights.

As history records, the Dutch colonists applied the “*Divide et impera*” colonial politic strategy in separating the many ethnics into each closed districts merely to easily have control on them, so in Semarang emerged the “Pelandan,” “Pecinan,” “Kauman,” Pekojan, Kanjengan” (the Dutch, the Chinese, the Indonesians, the Kojas) districts. In the 21st century, we need to adopt the paradigm and the policy of our City conservation—that is “the multi-ethnics Semarang's city conservation”- to show the world that after our Independence Day 1945, now we are together and will not be separated again. The heritage with multi-ethnic districts becomes a monument of “Unity with diversity in harmony,” over the Semarang's citizen and need to be conserved for the sake of history and on behalf of the mutual benefit for the Semarang's citizens. For example, the Semarang city with the multi-ethnic conservation area can be a favorite tourism destination with multi-ethnic attractions, culinary, culture, architecture and everyday-life atmosphere, which can generate and improve all every aspects of the life of the city. Starting from this point of view, we can firmly and strongly propose and campaign this “Multi-ethnics Semarang city conservation” as a public awareness movement<sup>1</sup>.

## Problems of Architectural Conservation in a Formerly Colonized Country in Semarang.<sup>2</sup>

Architectural heritage conservation in Semarang, Mid Java, faces many challenges and even threats. There are two kinds of architectural heritage conservation in a town like Semarang. The first is the heritage located in a declined region, a Bronx to be. The second is the heritage located on a very strategic business area. There are two different threats to each of the type of the heritage.

The first one, inherent with the region's problems, is that the “destiny” of the architectural heritage as a member of the declined region really depends on the “destiny” of that region. The decline of an old historic urban ‘Kota-lama’ at Jl. Raden Patah, Semarang, which is popular as ‘The Little Netherland’ is an example of the problem.

The decline of an old historic urban area is a problem often found in many countries. Owners of old buildings are reluctant to maintain their old-historical building because of the decline of the economic, social and even the political roles of that area. In that case, it will be very difficult to restore the declined area to be a bright and promising area again. When people started to abandon that area, the area would become a Bronx-like area. Almost no one will be interested in working, investing or even living in that area. ‘Kota-lama’ at Jl. Raden Patah, Semarang, which is popular as ‘The Little Netherland’ is an example of the problem. Many NGOs in collaboration with the government have made efforts to restore that ‘sleeping’ area, but until now, the result has not been significant.

## Intentionally Decaying Strategy<sup>3</sup>

Another problem is that some old historic urban areas located in old Downtown areas are currently becoming more and more interesting areas for business, capital investments and for living.

Unlike the decline of old historic urban areas, this condition raised many threats to the old historic urban areas as well. The land-value of that historic

and at the same time an actual Downtown is growing higher & higher, so it is understandable that owners of old historic buildings will undoubtedly try to develop the site of the old historic buildings into a more profitable site. The owner arranges ‘tricks’ to remove the old buildings in order to develop the site to an all new great gigantic buildings, with an incredible business prospect. One of the tricks nowadays is what we called “*Pembusukan*” (Indonesian for “spoiling, intentionally decaying strategy”). This means a clandestine effort to despoil protected old buildings until there are nothing left but ruins from the protected old building, so anyone can do anything on that ruins and nothing wrong with that.

This “Intentionally decaying strategy” covers the conflict of interest between the land-value and the historical-value of the building. That conflict triggered a “War” between the building owner with capitalistic interest, based on the profit of the real-property and the public interest of a historical building. That “War” involves many stake-holders, including the investor and the government. In that “War” many strategies were being used, among them, what the writer calls Intentionally Decaying Strategy. By this I mean a strategy planned by the owner of a heritage building to destroy the owner’s (heritage) building on behalf of profit making. So far, many of the architectural heritages in Semarang has suffered Intentionally Decaying Strategy.

The “tug of war” between the capital-owner interest and the public interest in the public space domain—such as the Heritage building usually leaves the public-interest subordinate. Semarang as one of the old-towns in Indonesia suffers the impact of that tug of war too.

### **Architectural Conservation on a Formerly Colonized Country<sup>4</sup>**

Instead of ordinary problems of Architectural Conservation in such countries, in Indonesia, there must be a special approach, attention and attitude on the Architectural Conservation of Colonial-buildings.

That has to be done because colony-building had a traumatic effect on the indigenous people and if treated wrongly it can bring back the feel of anguish in the present time.

Instead of that ordinary problem of architectural conservation there must be a special approach, attention and attitude on the architectural conservation of colonial building. In the first, colonialism makes their people ‘heroes’ as the ‘winner’ of the war on their overseas colonies. That will be an opposite case in a former colony.

Indonesia was colonized for more than 300 years. Colonialism nearly took all of what the colonized people have, agricultural-product: the Hongitochten, the Culturstelsel, many mining products, and workers: Rodi, Jugun Ianfu, liberty and even their dignity. All those have made the colonized people physically and psychologically being hurt. They have felt such a great anguish and a colonial building, if misused, can bring back the feel of anguish in the present time.

A colonial building was the setting and the place where abuse, torture and arrogance of colonialism occurred. A colonial building was consciously and intentionally designed to show the superiority of the colonials to the colonized people. At the time when an indigenous people had to come to a colonial building, they were in a position of a servant, even an accused. So they had to come in a very careful, ‘polite’ and maybe in a frightened way. This had to be taken for granted and there had to be ‘No-Question’ to this ‘Unwritten-law’. This ‘Unwritten-law’ had made a very deep trace or even scar into the feeling of indigenous people. The colonial-building than became a nightmare for nearly all of the ordinary indigenous people until the Freedom-day came and a new hope arise.

After Indonesia’s Independence Day on August 17th, 1945, all the colonial buildings were then occupied by the Indonesian Republic Government and the military had been given the authority to manage them. The military buildings as well as other military properties were managed in a military way. This mil-

itary management reached the strictest holding of the colonial buildings after the new regime, a military regime, took over the rule of the politics in 1965. The colonial buildings then had become more and more alienated from ordinary people. As other military buildings, the colonial buildings were guarded with standby guns, and taking photos of them was prohibited. No one had the permission to even look at the buildings. And so, the Colonial buildings had again become a nightmare for nearly all of the ordinary people for about 32 years.<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 1)

The next problem was the “*Divide et impera*” colonial political strategy in separating the many ethnics into each closed districts merely to easily have control on them. In Semarang emerged the “Pelandan,” “Pecinan,” “Kauman,” Pekojan, Kanjengan” (the Dutch, the Chinese, the Indonesians, the Kojas) districts. Semarang old city as an artifact of the colonial segregated social policy have to be careful and to have a specific treatment to overcome the old traumatic phenomena.

### Unity in diversity in harmony

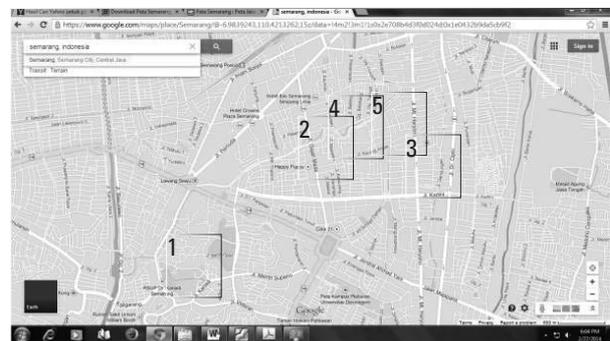
Until now the “*Divide et impera*” policy is still alive there although not so segregated as the colonial era. The indigenous people’s descendant still live there as



**Fig. 1** The Lawang sewu (Thousand doors) building, Kota lama (Semarang Old town)

the resident with their traditional customs. From the discussion above, we have known the importance of the conservation strategy in Semarang as a city in an ex colonized country, about the holistic multi ethnics’ conservation of Semarang old city. Departure from this point, the “Semarang’s city conservation in the context of tourism and culture should be implemented with the multi-ethnic spirit and nuance in holistic way and not to leave any part of the Old-city behind. The “Kota-lama” sector and the “Semawis” can be the locomotive to draw out all other sectors to go forward together to be a great district of holistic multi-ethnics conservation area.<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 2)

The Kanjengan district<sup>7</sup>, Pasar Djohar and district of Kauman Mosque, Dibya Puri Hotel<sup>8</sup>, cannot be separated and it is associated with the Old City—Little Nederland—with its mBerok Bridge, Tawang Station and its Polder, Kampong Melayu Region and the Chinatown, *nota—bene* possible in a matter of distance. The multi-ethnic spirit and nuance also includes the rules for the future development of the entire region, creating an integrated Old City of Semarang Tourism District, various specific ritual activities as an original Semarang’s culture and tradition can be conserved (nguri—uri). Dug—Deran festival at the beginning of Ramadhan, Warak Ngendog, Barongsay Ritual dances, parade



**Fig 2.** Map of Kotalama area and the Old heritage area in Semarang

Notes: 1. Lawang Sewu, 2. Djohar market, 3. Semawis Nightmarket, 4. Kampong Melayu, 5. Blenduk church

of many kinds of traditional food stalls Semawis are already way ahead, as well as the creation of new agendas Semarang<sup>9</sup>, cultural festivals and arts and last but not least, preparation and design of Semarang home-stay to provide a “Semarang live-in” to give a chance to enjoy the Semarang atmosphere in a holistic way. Instead of economic purposes, all of the agendas also in order to turn on the lives of Semarang’s culture. The effort is designed in order to negate the pejorative brand of Semarang, as a non-fertile town for cultivating art and culture. It is the culmination of Semarang’s actualization to all the residents’ dignity to be a multi-dimension prosperous people. (Fig. 3)

The heritage with multi ethnics district becomes a monument of unity with diversity in harmony, over the Semarang’s citizen and need to be conserved for the sake of history and on behalf of the mutual benefit for the Semarang’s citizen this time-being. For example, the Semarang city with the multi-ethnics conservation area can be a favorite tourism destination with multi-ethnic attractions, culinary, culture, architecture and everyday-life atmosphere, which can generate and improve all every aspects of the life of the city. Depart from this point of view, we can firmly and strongly propose and campaign this “Multi Ethnics Semarang’s city conservation” as a public awareness and movement. (Fig. 4, 5)



**Fig 3. the Minaret (tower) of Layur mosque, Kampung Melayu**



**Fig. 4 Pasar (market) Djohar as designed by olden Dutch architect, Herman Thomas Karsten**



**Fig. 5 The Kampong Bustaman everyday life**

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## Conclusion :

Architectural conservation in a formerly colonized country faces challenges, including the decline of the heritage area with the consequences that many of the heritage buildings are threatened by construction collapse. The next problem is the heritage building that lies on a prospective area where economic runs high. This leads to a threat on some heritage buildings remaining there. To avoid the law of conservation, some owners of heritage buildings carry out “Intentionally decaying strategy” to make their own heritage building collapse.

Semarang grew according to a colonial paradigm, called “*Divide et impera.*” The city is divided into several zones based on the difference of the ethnicity. The heritage conservation movement has arisen but does not cover all the old heritage area of the city. For the sake of the wholeness of the mission of the heritage conservation, more attention should be done to the other area, such as the Kauman, Pekojan, Alun-alun and Djohar as the traditional market. The recent traditional events by the community as a community based movement can be a good start in a fruitful campaign towards a prosperous community, an architectural conservation that embrace all communities and cover all the heritage area, develop an amazing heritage tourism through the old city. It all displays the spirit of “Unity in Diversity,” as Indonesian founding-fathers planned for us.

## Footnotes

- 1) Soesilo, Rudyanto, Multi Ethnic Semarang’s city conservation.
- 2) Soesilo Rudyanto, International Seminar on Environment & Urban Management, PMLP Unika soegijapranata, Semarang, 2006
- 3) Soesilo Rudyanto, “Intentionally Decaying Strategy, a threat to architectural heritage, Semarang case.

- 4) Soesilo Rudyanto, Architectural Conservation on an ex Colonized Country, the Semarang, Indonesia case.
- 5) Architectural Conservation in an ex Colonized Country like Indonesia, have had the First-rule, that it must guarantee that the coming use of the former colonial building will never awakened the trauma and the nightmare to the people—now—in the present time. (Altruism paradigm in Conservation). Soesilo Rudyanto, International Seminar on Environment & Urban Management, PMLP Unika soegijapranata, Semarang, 2006
- 6) Soesilo, Rudyanto, Multi Ethnic Semarang’s city conservation
- 7) Kanjengan district was demolished and turned into a shopping center about 20 years ago and great efforts are needed to return this district to a reconstruction conservation area
- 8) Dinya Puri Hotel, now is under the threat of “Intentionally decaying strategy,” (Soesilo Rudyanto, “Intentionally Decaying Strategy, a threat to architectural heritage, Semarang case. Presented for The third International Conference on Environment and Urban Management, “City marketing, Heritage and Identity,” 24rd–25th August 2007, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang, Indonesia).
- 9) The Kampoeng Bustaman festival, can be a prototype of traditional Semarang festival

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- 1) Jencks, Charles (1984). *The Language of Post-modern Architecture*. London: Academy Editions, Rizzoli.
- 2) Susanto, Budi (1984). *Politik & Postkolonialitas di Indonesia*, Kanisius, Yogyakarta.
- 3) Soesilo Rudyanto, (2006) *Architectural Conservation on an ex Colonized Country, the Semarang, Indonesia case*, International Seminar on Environment & Urban Management Seminar, 2 -3 August 2006, PMLP Unika Soegijapranata, Semarang.
- 4) Soesilo Rudyanto (2007). “Intentionally Decaying Strategy, a threat to architectural heritage, Semarang case. Presented for The third International Conference on Environment and Urban Management, “City marketing, Heritage and Identity,” 24rd–25th August 2007, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang, Indonesia.
- 5) Soesilo, Rudyanto (2013). *Multi Ethnic Semarang’s city conservation*, presented on 2nd International Conference on Urban Heritage and Sustainable Infrastructure Development (UHSID) 2013. *Rethinking Conservation—“TOWARDS OLD TOWN SEMARANG, THE WORLD HERITAGE CITY 2020.”* 9 November 2013, Diponegoro University, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia.