

**Diversity in Harmony**  
**in Multi-ethnic Architectural conservation on an ex Colonized country**  
Semarang, Indonesia case

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**Abstract**

Since the proclamation of Indonesian independence on August 17<sup>th</sup> 1945, this new Nation has its motto: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* means Plural but One, Unity in diversity. This concept infiltrates in all of many aspects of every Indonesian life, means this concept should infiltrates in any Indonesian city as the place where Indonesian people life take place. Semarang as an Old Indonesian city has a long history and nowadays it's time for a heritage building's conservation movement.

As a city in an ex colonized country, Semarang faces some 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 threaten of a construction collapse and in Semarang city, the bad impact is being doubled with the risen of the sea-level (Rob) that makes the heritage area are submerged in seawater flood. The next problem is on the heritage building lies on a prospective area where economic runs high. This leads to a threat on some heritage buildings lies there. To avoid from the law of conservation, some owner of those heritage buildings do "Intentionally decaying strategy" to make their own heritage building collapsed.

As an ex colonized city, Semarang grew and designed in a colonial paradigm, called "*Divide et impera*". The city is divided into several zones based on the difference of the ethnicity. So there raised "Pelandan", "Pecinan", "Kauman", Pekojan" (the Dutch, the Chinese, the Indonesians, the Kojas) districts etc. Until now, the conservation movement focuses on the Kota-lama – Little Nederland and on Semawis - a community-based conservation effort on ex-Chinese community area. The city's resident and the government seem to forget the traditional Javanese area Alun-alun & Kanjengan, Djohar market, Kauman and Pekojan. But recently a cheerful trend do happen, some community has organized itself and arrange many special and traditional events, we can find at Kampung Bustaman, Warak ngendog festival, Dhug Dher festival and many others. By organizing all the capacity of the many layer, many ethnicity of all the city's resident, there we can prove that we can break the divider that have ever built in this nation history, and turn it into a fruitful campaign towards a prosperous community, an architectural conservation that embrace all community and covering all the heritage area, develop an amazing heritage tourism through the old city. It all, displays the spirit of "Unity in diversity" towards "Diversity in Harmony", precisely, as our founding-fathers have planned for us!

**Keywords:** *Multi Ethnics Semarang's city conservation, Heroic conservation, conservation in an ex Colonized country*

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**Introduction**

A city is an artifact as a product of the long history of the city. Semarang as an old city had travel a long history too, and the whole architecture of Semarang's city and its districts and regions reflects the path of that history. So every parts of Semarang city has its own value and share to the whole Semarang's history.

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That's 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) and many others - have been poured to lift up and promote "Kota-Lama" as an ex- 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 till Sunday nights.

As history record, the Dutch Colonial 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 etc. Now in 21<sup>st</sup> 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 not being separated again. 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-ethnic conservation area can be a favorite tourism destination with multi-ethnic attraction, 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<sup>1</sup>.

### **Problems of Architectural Conservation on an ex Colonized Country in Semarang<sup>2</sup>.**

Architectural heritage conservation in Semarang, Mid Java, faces many challenges and even threats. There are 2 kinds of architectural heritage conservation in an ex colonized town like Semarang. The first is the heritage located on 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 problem,

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<sup>1</sup> Soesilo, Rudyanto, Multi Ethnics Semarang's city conservation.

<sup>2</sup> Soesilo Rudyanto, International Seminar on Environment & Urban Management, PMLP Unika soegijapranata, Semarang, 2006

the "destiny" of the architectural heritage as a member of the declined region is 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.

Usually, in many countries the decline of an old historic urban area is a problem often found on 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 will become a Bronx-like area. Almost no one will be interested to work - invest - or even live on 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 many efforts to restore that 'sleeping' area, but until now, the result has not been significant yet.

### **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. The land-value become financially so high, that stimulates the Owners to arrange 'tricks' to remove the Old buildings, we called "*Pembusukan*" (Indonesia : spoiling, Intentionally decaying strategy.)

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 getting higher & higher, so it is understandable that owners of old historic buildings will undoubtedly always try to develop the site of the old historic buildings to a more profitable site. The land-value become financially so high, it even stimulates the Owners to arrange 'tricks' to remove the Old buildings so that the owner can develop the site to an all new great gigantic buildings, with an incredible business prospect. One of the tricks that is very popular nowadays is what we called "*Pembusukan*" (Indonesia : spoiling, intentionally decaying strategy), 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" cover the conflict of interest between the land-value and the historical-value of the building. That conflict

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<sup>3</sup> Soesilo Rudyanto, "Intentionally Decaying Strategy, a threat to architectural heritage, Semarang case.

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” involving many “actors” and stake-holders, e.g. the investor, the Government, etc. 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 put many efforts to destruct the owner's (heritage) building on behalf of profit making. So far, many of the architectural heritages in Semarang has suffered Intentionally Decaying Strategy, done by the owner themselves.

The "Tug of war" between the Capital-owner interest and the Public interest in the Public space domain - such as the Heritage building - usually let the Public-interest to be the subordinate. Semarang as one of the old-towns in Indonesia suffers the impact of that Tug of war too.

#### **Architectural Conservation on an ex Colonized Country<sup>4</sup>**

Instead of ordinary problems of Architectural Conservation in such countries, in an ex Colonized Country like Indonesia, there must be a special approach, attention and attitude on the Architectural Conservation of Colonial-buildings. That have to be done because in an ex Colonized country, the Colonial-building had given a traumatic feeling to the indigenous people and if treated wrong, can bring back the feel of anguish in the present time.

Instead of that ordinary problem of Architectural Conservation in such countries, in an ex Colonized Country like Indonesia, there must be a special approach, attention and attitude on the Architectural Conservation of Colonial-building. There must be a different approach and attitude between architectural conservation on a Colonial country than on an 'ex Colonized country'. In the first, Colonialism gives their people 'Heroes' as the 'Winner' of the war on their overseas colonies. That will be an opposite case in an ex Colonized country, the Colonial-building can give a traumatic feeling to the indigenous people.

Indonesia was colonized for more than 300 (three hundred) 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 treated wrong, can bring back the feel of anguish in the present time.

A Colonial building was the setting and the place

<sup>4</sup> 4) Soesilo Rudyanto, Architectural Conservation on an ex Colonized Country, the Semarang, Indonesia case,

where all the Colonialism was done including the abuse, the torture and all the arrogance of Colonialism. 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 had to be in a position of a loser, 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 the 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945, all the Colonial buildings were then occupied by the Indonesian Republic Government and the military had been given the authorities to manage them. The military buildings as well as other military properties were managed in a military way. This military management reached the strictest holding of the Colonial buildings after The New Order regime - which was a Military regime - took-over the rule of the politics on 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 have a glance look at the buildings. Everyone had to soon go away from the Military-buildings without even had the chance to look at them. And so, the Colonial buildings had again become a nightmare for nearly all of the ordinary people for about 32 years<sup>5</sup>.



**Figure 1 the Lawang sewu (a Thousand doors)**

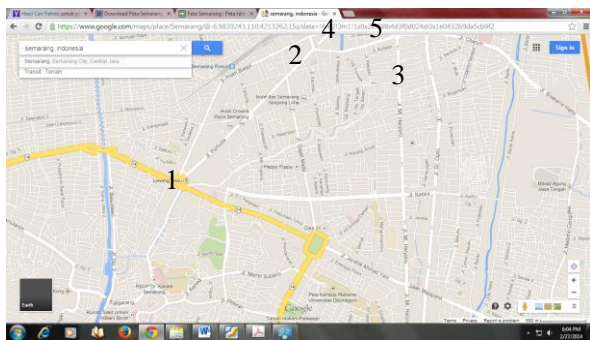
<sup>5</sup> building, Kota lama (Semarang Old town)

country like Indonesia, have had the First-rule, that it must guarantee that the coming use of the ex 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

The next problem was 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 etc. Semarang old city as an artifact of the Colonial’s 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 in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the remains of the “*Divide et impera*” policy is still live there although not so segregated as the colonial era. The indigenous people’s descendant still be there as 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>



**Figure 2** Map of Kotalama area and the Old herigae area in Semarang

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

The Kanjengan district<sup>7</sup>, Pasar Djohar and district

<sup>6</sup> 6) Soesilo, Rudyanto, Multi Ethnics Semarang’s city conservation

<sup>7</sup> Kanjengan district, had been demolished and turn into a shopping center about 20 years ago, need a great efforts to return this district to a reconstruction

of Kauman Mosque , Dibya Puri Hotel<sup>8</sup> , can not 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 of many kinds of traditional food stalls Semawis are already way ahead , as well as the creation of new agendas Semarangian<sup>9</sup> , Cultural festivals and arts and last but not lease, preparation and design of Semarangian home-stay to provide a “Semarangian live-in” to give a choice to enjoy the Semarang atmosphere in a holistic way. Instead of economical 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.

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

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



**Figure 3** Kampung Melayu mosque

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Figure 5 the Kampong Bustaman everyday life

#### Conclusion :

Architectural conservation in an ex colonized country facing some challenges, i.e.: the decline of the heritage area with the consequences that many of the heritage buildings are threaten of a construction collapse and as the opposite, 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 lies there. To avoid from the law of conservation, some owner of those heritage buildings do "Intentionally decaying strategy" to make their own heritage building collapsed.

As an ex colonized city, Semarang grew and designed in 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 doesn't 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 etc. The recent traditional events by the community as a community based movement can be a good start into a fruitful campaign towards a prosperous community, an architectural conservation that embrace all community and covering 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 have planned for us!

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