

Rejuvenating Historical Cities: An Evaluation of the Revitalization of the Old City of Semarang, Indonesia

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Abstract

Revitalization is an effort to revive a dead area, add activities and buildings, and increase the vitality of the area. Many old parts of cities face such situations and the issue of revitalization must be dealt with carefully after understanding the problems, needs and the potentials.

In Indonesia, the old city of Semarang area appear very chaotic. Its cultural heritage has not been well maintained and there are economic and social problems. In fact, one of the most significant problems has arisen from tidal flooding. Many residents are reluctant to occupy the buildings there and many buildings have been abandoned. This has attracted the homeless and crimes because there are some places in the dark in the night. There are also still buildings from the Dutch colonial era, which had previously functioned as offices, trade and services as well as other activities which do not functions anymore. Many of these buildings are now derelict.

This study examines the old town of Semarang to demonstrate that it has an impact on the social conditions and the economy of the surrounding. It also provides an overview of the potential of tourism related to the existing cultural heritage. The research objectives are to find out the form of revitalizations that have been implemented in the old city of Semarang and to evaluate the progress after the revitalization.

The research employs a descriptive approach. It describes the revitalization of the old city and its architecture in detail. The paper concludes that revitalizing the Semarang old town area should be seen not only as a world cultural heritage recognized by the UNESCO but also as a mechanism to revive the activities and restructure the old city. It argues that institutional strengthening and marketing must be increased again so that it can elevate the image of the Kota Lama area of Semarang. This revitalization could greatly promote an increase in the economic activities.

Keywords: Revitalization, old city, cultural heritage, Semarang, Indonesia.

Introduction

Revitalization is an effort to revive a dead area, add activities and buildings, and increase the liveliness of the area bringing back life (Danisworo, 2000). Across the world, many old cities have undergone revitalization. In Indonesia, the revitalization of the Semarang old town area which took place in 2017 is a step to revive the Semarang city government and to make the area a part of the World Heritage. This will maintain its cultural heritage. It is an area that was once a Dutch settlement with good facilities and infrastructure. However, the area has been increasingly neglected and abandoned by its inhabitants. Today, it has become a place that is no longer productive.

Indeed, the Kota Lama Semarang area of the city looks very chaotic; it has been flooded in the past. Its cultural heritage has not been maintained and there are social problems leading to

economic decline. Sometimes ago, there were serious tidal flooding in the area and many residents have been reluctant to use the buildings. The city has been abandoned, and is now occupied mostly by the homeless. Since then, it is prone to crime because some places remain in the dark in the night.

In the Semarang old town, there are still buildings from the Dutch colonial era, which had functioned as offices, trade and services as well as other activities. Unfortunately many of these buildings are now abandoned (Febbiyana & Suwandono, 2016; Madiasworo, 2009). In fact, it used to be an icon during the Dutch Colonial era, because it was one of the embryos for the formation of the city. It has had a high historical value and has unique characteristics (Dewi et al., 2008). Interestingly, the area has subsequently been revitalized and has had a huge impact on development. However, numerous problems still remain. Therefore, it is necessary to make an effort to find ways to improve the area further. Its derelict condition warrants the Semarang City Government to carry out improvements prioritizing the concept of the quality of urban living to enhance the city.

There is no doubt that revitalization of the area can increase the economic activities. Apart from tourism, it can attract many other activities including local and international tourists. They should be able to come to the Semarang old town area. Improvements also needs adding better and more complete support facilities. Needless to say, the revitalization can also maintain the preservation of cultural heritage buildings in the area. It needs a conceptualization of a traditional cultural medium upon which local consciousness, value, and reflexes could grow and undergo dynamic processes through time from one achieved cultural equilibrium to the next (Widiastuti & Kurniati, 2019)

This research illustrates that the present state of the Semarang old town area has an impact on the economy and the well-being of the surrounding area. It also provides an overview of the tourism potential of the existing cultural heritage. The research objectives therefore is to evaluate the revitalization practices implemented in the area, and locate the needs and problems.

The research will provide many benefits. First, it can provide inputs for the form of revitalization to be carried out. Further, it can also facilitate further revitalization efforts. The research consists of two parts. Its substantial scope is related to the discussion regarding the arrangement of the revitalization and arrangement of the cultural heritage buildings that are there. Its spatial scope is the old town area of Semarang.

Data and Identification

There are regulations of the Ministry of Public Works Number 11/PRT/M/2011 related to the Guidelines for Revitalizing Areas and Regulation and of the Ministry of Public Works Number No. 06/2007 concerning Building Layout and Environment Plans. They are to be applied to any activities carried out in the area. Revitalization of the Semarang old town area can improve the quality and image of the function of the area both from economic, social and cultural aspects provided they adhere to these rules and regulations.

The Place

The old town area of Semarang is located in the Tanjung Mas Village, North Semarang District and the Purwodinatan Village, Central Semarang District as shown in the map below.

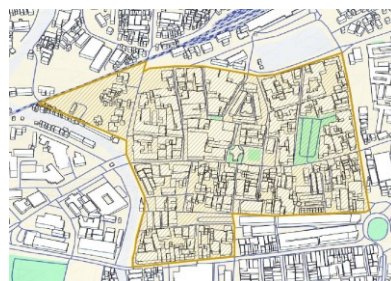


Fig. 01: Map of the old town of Semarang
Source: Cadmapper, 2022

The area of the old town is approximately 27 hectares. To the North, it is bordered by the Tawang Street (Noorderwalstraat street), and to the West is the Mpu Tantular Street (Westerwalstraat

and Parkhuisstraat street); to the East, it is bordered by the Cendrawasih Street (Oosterwalstraat street) and to the South, it borders the Sendowo Street known also as the Ziderwalstraat Street (Krisprantono, 2009).

According to Perawati et al. (2011), the old town can be identified with 5 areas for the construction of the ‘image the city’ (Perawati et al., 2011) based on Lynch (1960). They are as follows:

1. Path is a space to move from one place to another; here, they exist as a street network which connects one place to another, namely: Mpu Tantular Street, Letjen Suprpto Street, Tawang Street, Merak Street and Kepodang Street.

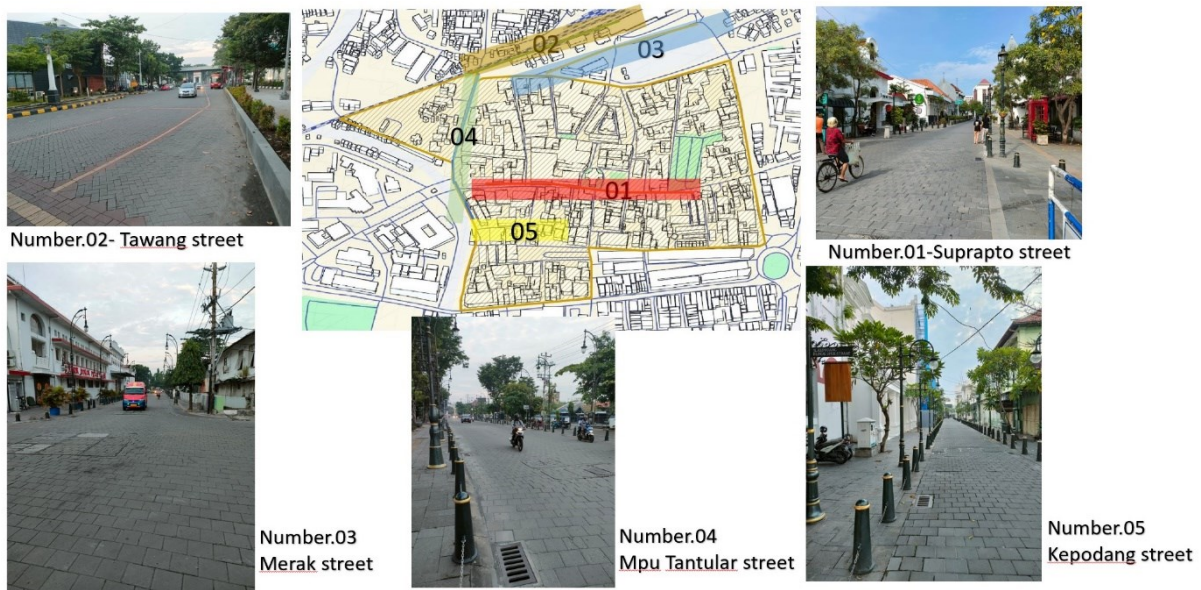


Fig. 02: The road that divides the old town.

Source: Author, 2022

2. District is a part of a city that has a character or activity that can be recognized by observers. Here, it is an area with Dutch nuances. This is also known as the ‘Little Netherland’.



Fig. 03: Offices of shipping affairs and trade stores

Source: Author, 2022

- a. This building is a Bank Mandiri building which was formerly the office of the Netherlands Handel Maatschappij (NHM). NHM was one of the largest corporations in the Dutch colonial area. The building was built on August 2, 1908.

- b. This building is the building of PT. Plantation XV Persero. It is one of the relics of the Dutch colonial era with a European architectural style. The company is engaged in agriculture and plantations.
 - c. This building is a church building that was built in 1753. It is in neo-classical style. The church is called GPIB Immanuel. Initially, this building was in the form of a Javanese stilt house and was renovated several times. At the end, the shape of this church building has a dome shape as it is now.
 - d. The red identical building was built by Marta Bardjunet, a rich merchant from Yemen. The name marba is taken from her name. The marba building was built in the 19th century. Initially, this building was used as the office of a shipping business. However, at the end, this building was used only as a warehouse.
 - e. This building is a shop owned by the Winkel Maatschappij Company. The building was built in 1895 by Mr. Addler. The building functions as a store for various kinds of office and household needs, such as textiles, furniture, typewriters, sporting goods and so on.
3. Edge is a boundary in the form of a design, road, mountain, or a river that has a strong identity because of a visual appearance: the end of a district.



Fig. 04: Edge of old town Semarang

Source: Author, 2022

4. Landmark is a symbol that is visually appealing by its positional nature and attracts attention. Usually in the form of a unique symbol, a symbol as a characteristic of an area in a particular city and can also be a supporting element for an area or city.



Fig. 05: The Blenduk Church, A landmark of the old town of Semarang
Source: Author, 2022

The GPIB Immanuel church building is one of the land marks of the old city of Semarang and is one of the tourist objects frequently visited by the tourists because this building is quite prominent with its dome shaped like half a ball. People who see this building call it the Blenduk church which is taken from the word in the Javanese language "blenduk" which means a large bloated shape.

5. Nodes, it is the knots of the T-junctions/junctions in the old city which are the knot points, the hallmark of the old city. The first node is Jalan Suprpto, and the second is Taman Srigunting.

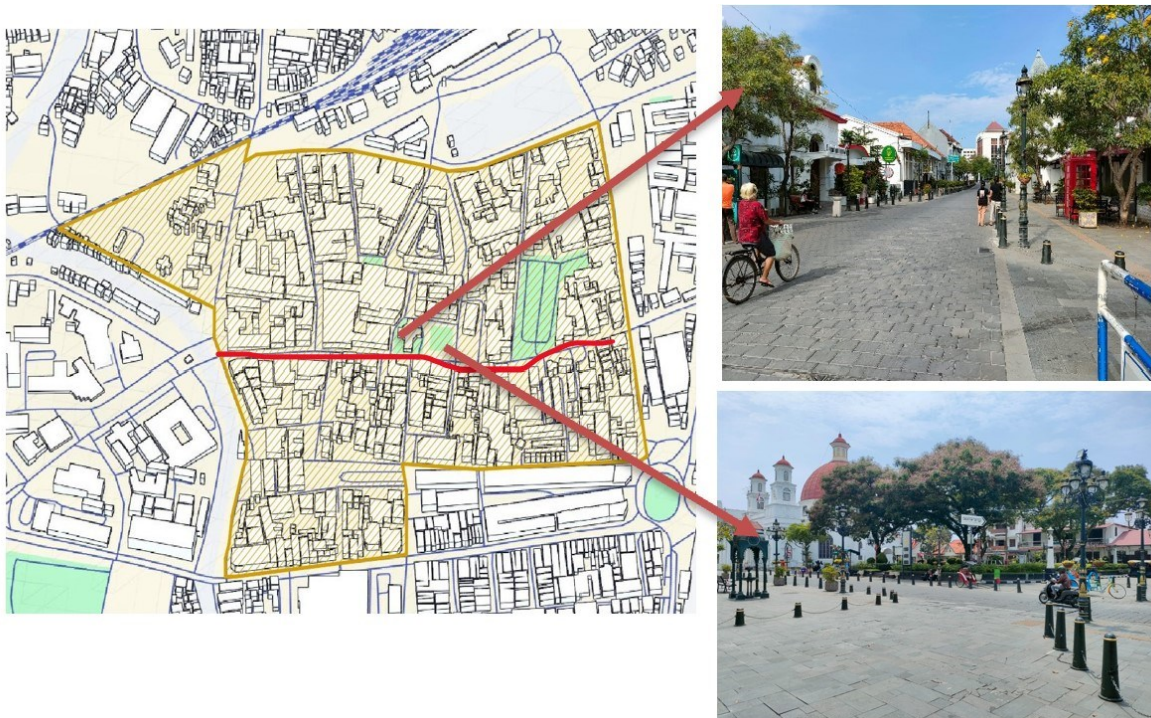


Fig. 06 : Nodes Old City Semarang
Source : Author, 2022

Jl. Suprpto is a road that divides the old city area into two areas. This road is very busy as can be seen from several T-junctions that lead to Jl. Suprpto. Which has become a gathering point. The road becomes a stopping place for city observers so that it gets their attention at the places of the road and they can also see some of the nearby elements more clearly. Jalan Suprpto can be assumed to have special advantages compared to other locations.

Research Methods

This research employs observations to collect data based on case study approach. In this case the old town area of Semarang is the case study. The transformations and revitalization activities were observed and recorded graphically and some photographic recordings have also been carried out. The analysis involves descriptive understanding of the material observed.

Findings

Problems in the Old Town Area of Semarang

The old town area of Semarang has several problems that have arisen before the revitalization activities were put in place. They are as follows :

- Growing slums.
- Traffic congestions occurs.
- High level of crime.
- Floods.
- Decline of the vitality of the area

The city government of Semarang has adapted the Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2020 concerning plans for restructuring the old town area of Semarang to maintain the preservation of cultural heritage in the area. However, revitalization was aimed at reviving the dead areas into areas that can have a positive impact on the economy (social/cultural and development activities). It is expected to affect the aspects of space utilization, the characteristics of the buildings, residential characteristics and the land prices.

The Semarang old town area has several core zones (Firdausyah & Dewi, 2020), such as:

- a. Modern economics zone: This area has activities for education and a service zone such as the shops, and the banks.
- b. Traditional trade and commerce zone: This is like a business centre.
- c. Culture zone: As a recreation area that is full of cultural heritage.
- d. Office and retail zone: Such as warehouse and offices.
- e. Recreation zone: such as a station and a hotel.

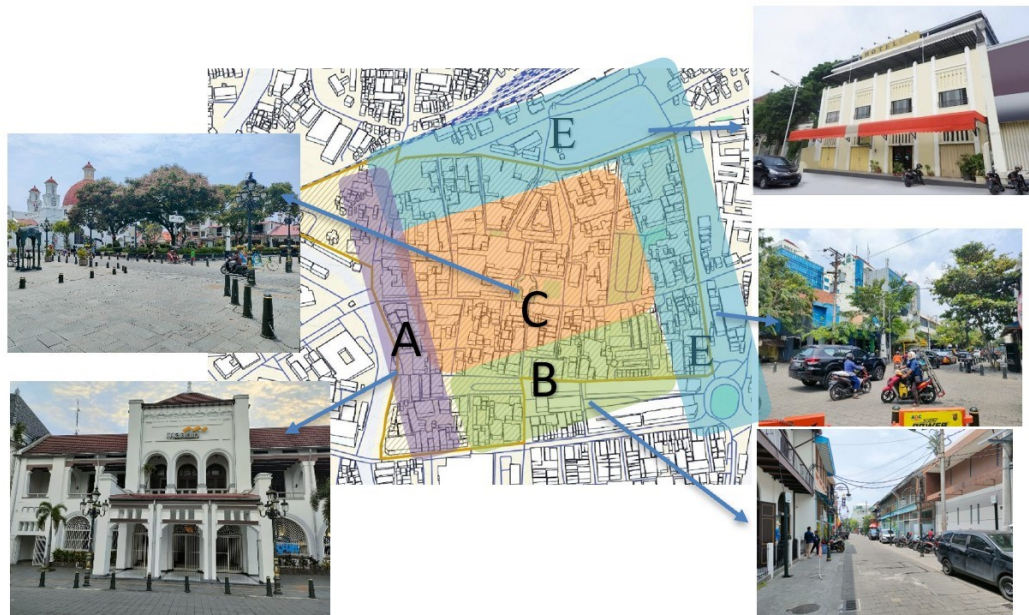


Fig. 07: The old town zones

Source : Author, 2022

Precedents Study

Many revitalizations have been carried out across the world. Examining how they have been initiated and carried out could throw light onto the ways in which effective revitalizations can be done. Two such cases of Urban revitalizations are presented below.

Melaka City Revitalization

Melaka city is one of the states in Malaysia. In 2008, Melaka was declared by the UNESCO as a World Heritage city. The revitalization carried out in the Melaka City demonstrates how to revitalize a city that has a European heritage. The Melaka city area has something in common with the Semarang old town area because it has heritage buildings from the former Dutch occupation. The historical buildings in Melaka city are government offices, churches, squares and forts. The city centre of it is called the core zone which is split in the middle by the Melaka River which consists of residential and commercial areas known as the Red Square (Ertan & Egercioglu, 2015).



Fig. 08: Melaka City Area
Source: Sonaesti, 2021

The revitalization of the Melaka city area has increased the economy there (Salim, 2018). The supporting facilities there look very good (Salim, 2018). There is a pedestrian area where a barrier is made between the pedestrians and the vehicles. It has also added guides and information boards offering explanations and images of the area so that the tourists visiting there don't get lost. In addition to these supporting facilities, they have also added open areas, cafes, restaurants, hotels, public toilet areas, lighting and seats.

Revitalization of the George Town in Malaysia

George Town is the capital of the state of Pulau Minang, Malaysia. This city is one of the main ports in the Malacca Strait. It was an important port for trade transit between China and India in 1786. George Town was designated by UNESCO on July 7, 2008 as a historic city centre. It is the oldest city centre in the area and is surrounded by a support zone.



Fig. 09: George Town Malaysia Area
Source: Sonaesti, 2021

What is interesting in George Town is that any changes to the building are limited by UNESCO conservation law. The buildings in George Town have not changed their facades, but some of the residents here make paintings on the walls and that is what attracts tourists to George Town. (Salim, 2018).

Evaluation of the Revitalization of the Old Town Area of Semarang Architectural and Social Aspects

The arrangement of the Old City of Semarang has had an impact on society with evidence of increasing service trading activities. More and more conversions have been made from ordinary residential buildings to office buildings, cafes or restaurants following the efforts of the local government to reorganize the Semarang old town area with the concept of sustainable urban form and structure. Sustainable forms and cities and development is driven by a concept which emphasises not only development that meets the present generation but development that meets the future generations. This encourages the use of buildings with historical values, which were initially stalled, causing a change in the use of the building. Several restaurants and cafes use buildings with European architecture. This shows that capital investment / asset improvement in the culinary field has greatly increased.



Fig. 10: Utilization of ancient buildings for investment capital / asset improvement
Source : Author, 2022

This proves that the concept of urban living quality implemented by the Municipal Government of Semarang has a positive impact on architectural continuity. This is driven by a concept that combines practical and efficient circulation with the placement of buildings combining the green areas that are evenly distributed and easy to reach.

The impacts that arise in the social aspect are more towards supporting facilities or public facilities as well as the impressions obtained from visitors regarding the issues of security, comfort and order. Public facilities that must be considered there, are as follows:

1. Parking Lots



Fig. 11 : Parking area
Source : Author, 2022

One of the most important spaces to improve in the old town area of Semarang is the parking area, because several existing buildings in the area were not designed for parking. Thus there are several illegal ad-hoc parking lots which have resulted in the disruption of activities and traffic. Moreover, the parking spaces provided there are inadequate.

2. Toilets



Fig. 12: Toilet

Source : Author, 2022

There are not many toilets accessible to the public. There is only one public toilet in the central garden area. Sometimes it doesn't function and is not available. Undeniably, there must be adequate toilets compared to the number of the visitors.

3. Rubbish bins

There are no trash cans in the area. Tourists are greatly inconvenienced by their absence, and there is a need to provide the service in a systematic manner.



Fig. 13: Toilet

Source : Author, 2022

4. Sitting benches

There are hardly any public benches to sit and this inadequacy curtails the use of the public spaces as the streets and open areas.



Fig. 14: Bench

Source : Author, 2022

5. Signposting

In a city that promotes tourism, directions are very important. In the old town area of Semarang, there are very few direction signs. Providing directions can make it easier for visitors to find the building or location they want to go to, and this needs to be done in a way, that it does not damage the visual appearance of the city but contribute to its enhancement while providing the necessary signposting.



Fig. 15: Signs
Source: Author, 2022

6. Celebration centre



Fig. 16: Letjend. Soeprapto street
Source: Author, 2022

The Soeprapto street compared to other street points appear to pull the crowds and is like a centre of the city. Some of the things that underlie this busy road are:

1. Being at the center of the Semarang old town area.
2. The existence of the Blenduk Church as a Landmark.
3. There are public spaces, such as parks in this area.
4. There are supporting facilities in this area such as the commercial buildings that attract visitors.
5. Traffic is indeed made towards Jalan Soeprapto.

There are several building functions that are not maintained. Most buildings are thus neglected and damaged. This is because the owner of the land is unknown. There are several reasons for the owners of cultural heritage buildings to be inactive. They are unable to carry out proper maintenance and management due to the high operational costs. If done, it will need to meet the conservation requirements that are carried out. As a result, several buildings have been allowed to collapse, while some have requested their cultural heritage status revoked, fearing that it would be difficult to even sell the buildings (Sari et al, 2017).



Fig. 17: Unmaintained buildings
Source: Author, 2022

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of revitalizing the Semarang old town area is not only as a world cultural heritage that is recognized by UNESCO but also to revive the activities of restructuring the city. Institutional strengthening and marketing must be increased again so that it can elevate the image of the Kota Lama area of Semarang. This revitalization greatly affects the increase in activities.

1. In addition, it is necessary to improve the arrangement of the area so that it becomes even better improved in terms of the public facilities.
2. Toilet facilities need to be added.
3. Seating has to be added at several points.
4. Areas at several points need to be reconsidered to find ways to make them attract people.
5. For the buildings that are not maintained, the Semarang City Government should find a solution so that the owners can preserve or maintain their cultural heritage buildings.
6. The Semarang City Government must always monitor and evaluate regularly to find out the response from the community towards the arrangement of the city, to be able to ensure that the arrangement does not only give awards to the Semarang City Government, but must think about how the arrangement could be better in the future to make the society prosperous.
7. Jalan Suprpto has an important role as a main route (path) that stands out, has a good path structure and has an identity in the form of a path flanked by distinctive buildings. It also has a good structure. Besides that, it has a good district structure and there is an identity in the area and a distinctive building mass arrangement and there are activities as a center for trade and services, offices and worship in the old city area of Semarang.

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