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## Conservation and New Development in Historic Cities: The Case of Rehabilitation and Rebuilding of Public Offices in Solo, Indonesia

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**Abstract:**

*Development is an inevitable process to every city. Old buildings that are considered no longer able to function properly are rehabilitated or replaced. For an historic city, this development process needs to be regulated. This paper discusses theoretical studies concerning new development in historic cities as well as appropriate design approaches that hold sensitivity to the identity and character of a place. It also argues how local government play an important role as urban manager in determining planning and design in an historic city. As case studies, this paper explains the experience of Solo, Indonesia, and how the city demonstrated a preliminary effort to improve its cultural identity through the rehabilitation and rebuilding of public offices. It discusses how the Mayor JokoWidodo (2005-2012) and the Municipality of Solo involves in the design process. The paper concludes that a design guideline derived from an integrated city plan as well as profound research and observation prior to design process of conservation and new development are necessary in the urban heritage conservation of Solo.*

**Keywords:** *Historic cities, urban heritage conservation, rehabilitation, local authority, Solo City*

### 1. Introduction

Urban heritage as landmark identifies an historic city and distinguishes it from others. Conservation of an historic city is not merely preserving old buildings, but also making a connection among the past, the present and the future. “When we realize that past and present are not exclusive, but inseparable realm, we cast off preservation’s self-defeating insistence on a fixed and stable past. Only by altering and adding to what we save does our heritage remain real, alive, and comprehensible” (Lowenthal, 1985, in Semes, 2009). However, conservation of an historic city is always under constant threats from development.

Development is an inevitable process to every city, where new buildings are constructed to accommodate contemporary needs. Old buildings that are considered no longer able to functions properly are rehabilitated. However, when the rehabilitation is still not sufficient to accommodate present-day activities of the people, the old buildings are replaced. This new development, that is usually infill, becomes preferable. For an historic city, this development process needs to be regulated in order to conserve historical urban spatial and architectural character of the city.

### 2. Design within Historic Environment: Sensitivity to the Old

Concerning new development in historic settings, respect and sensitivity to the identity and character of the quarter, both spatial and architectural, are essential. When demolition of old buildings does occur, particular characteristic and historic values of old building and its settings remain important above all (Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath, 1996). As early as 1964, Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, stated the importance of the setting, that preservation is not intended only to the single architectural work but also of the urban or rural setting. In 1976, UNESCO passed the Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, that stated the necessary of the architecture of new buildings to adapt harmoniously to spatial organisation and the historic setting, and that the analysis of its dominant features, like heights, colours, materials and forms, proportions and positions should be done in prior. Another important document, Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (Washington Charter, 1987) adopted by ICOMOS, also confirms the necessity of harmony between new buildings with the surroundings, by adapting in to the existing ones, including its spatial layout.

The importance of a sensitive new development, including those with infill design approach, is also highlighted in Charter for the Conservation of Indonesian Heritage Cities (2013). Infill design as well as urban spatial planning and structure/infrastructure planning of heritage cities are among eight instruments of conservation and management of the Indonesian heritage cities and towns. This charter states that management planning of the heritage cities must be supported by a good, holistic, systematic, and comprehensive, that is integrated with the natural, cultural and cultural landscape heritage management, in a harmonious way through the development

of conservation instruments of the heritage cities. The harmony created by a new development will give the opportunity to repair damage to the historic setting brought about by previous insensitive or oppositional interventions. It will also reconnect segments of the historic environment to the context that formerly have them coherent.

Harmony with the historic context can be achieved through an appropriate design approach. According to Tyler (2009), the design approach, called contextualism, yields contemporary architecture that is sensitive to and compatible with the context surrounding it. He explains that it means contemporary design should blend with the old, so that the new and old are distinguishable but compatible. He explores that there are three design approaches that can be taken when designing in an historic building or district: matching, contrasting and compatible. He further argues that among these approaches, compatible is the most common one, that the new design should be sensitive to the historic setting.

The sensitivity of the new design to the old buildings and settings are determined by the opted attitude. Semes (2009) argues there are four possible attitudes in designing within historic environment, characterised with the most to the least adherence towards the architectural and urban features of the historic setting. The first the attitude, literal replication, directly reproduces or closely imitates the existing structure or ensemble. Similar to Tyler, he also includes the compatibility approach, but he divides it into two different attitudes, invention within a style and abstract reference. Both of the approaches seek to achieve the balance between differentiation and compatibility. However, the former tends to favour 'compatibility', while the latter weighted on preference of 'differentiation'. The last possibility is called intentional opposition, a contrasting attitude that carries a stark difference with the pre-existing.

### **3. Planning, Design and the Role of Local Authority**

According to Pendlebury (2009), comprehensive planning is the best means of reconciling the historic city with modernity. He explains that this can be achieved through a balanced approach that advocated between the conservation of historic character and the continuing evolution of the living city.

Local government is the primary actor in determining planning and design in historic quarters of the city. Through legal framework and development policy, they arrange design guidelines that fit the local architectural and urban morphological character. Therefore, conservation is an integral part of the planning process at local level, where decisions are regulated and influenced by planning officers and elected members. Among the tasks of the local authority-planning department are reactive actions in the form of development control and proactive actions such as regeneration and environmental improvement initiatives (Orbaşlı, 2008).

Orbaşlı (2008) reports that development control are part of the town planning, the basic tool for heritage protection in most northern European countries. She explains that with or without being combined with specific legislation, they have well established and efficient system in place. Conservation policies should ideally be integrated with local town plans, in order to ensure a more effective approach in conserving character and value of a place. She further argues that this can be achieved not only through integrated planning approaches, but also through good communication practices between various departments and on-going dialogue with private and non-governmental sector.

Facilitating communication among various stakeholders in conservation is another important role of local authority. Selected based on the scope of the project and its impacts, among these stakeholders are: local communities, preservation activists, architectural and regional planning professional groups and so on. Good communication is required in a series of development planning process. The city government, through the planning authority, decides the start of the process of appointment of architects, design presentations and consultations with the stakeholders, revision, presentation of the results of the revision, until eventually led to design approval. Therefore, the success of a project is determined by collaboration, mutual respect and shared commitment. A creative dialogue between the planning authority, the client, the architect and the other key professionals involved will result as the best buildings.

### **4. Conservation and New Development in Solo, Indonesia**

#### *4.1. Urban Heritage and Identity*

Located in central part of island of Java, Solo is one of the historic cities in Indonesia. The founding of Solo dates back to some hundred years ago, when it was once the capital of Mataram Kingdom, an essential Javanese Islamic monarchy from late 16<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Being known as one the Javanese arts and cultural centre, Solo possesses two important principalities: Keraton Kasunanan and Pura Mangkunagaran. It has a range of urban heritage that includes residential areas, parks, buildings, city border gates, and so on.

In contrast to developed countries where historic urban landscapes are well maintained, until a decade ago many urban heritage of Solo suffered from various problems: minimum maintenance funds, ownership status conflicts, street vendors within historic environment, as well as rampant construction of new buildings. There was lack of understanding of the importance of heritage for present use, due to the past is still considered close to the present (Agustiananda, 2014).

However, since the leadership of Joko Widodo, from year 2005 to 2012, Solo began to improve itself in order to return to his identity as an historic city. Through the slogan '*Solo the past is Solo the future*', Mayor Widodo sought to restore Solo's cultural identity. Various efforts to strengthen the historic character of Solo were carried out through, such as, the conservation and rehabilitation of city's historic parks, rehabilitation of traditional markets, spatial and physical arrangement in historical districts, as well as organisation and relocation of street vendors located within such districts. Networking with other historic towns and cities in Indonesia and abroad was also developed. Since 2007, Solo started to be a member of the Organisation of Euro-Asia World Heritage Cities

(OWHC). Solo also became one of the cities that pioneered the birth of Jaringan Kota Pusaka Indonesia (JKPI), a network for heritage cities of Indonesia, in 2008.

#### 4.2. Rehabilitation, Renovation and Rebuilding of Public Buildings

Despite all urban heritage conservation efforts, there was no local regulation concerning conservation in place at that moment, including those concerning issues of rehabilitation of old buildings as well as construction of new buildings in urban historic quarters. Nevertheless, Mayor Widodo was convinced that one thing could be done before the regulation ready to be issued, was the arrangement of public buildings whose constructions were funded by the government and local authority. By understanding that many historic buildings had become privately owned in the past and there was still no public incentives scheme for *private* owners, he decided to give more attention to the rehabilitation of existing *public* buildings.

Among public buildings rehabilitated were the offices of *kelurahan* (village or neighbourhood administrative), the smallest unit of city administration. There are 51 *kelurahan* under Solo Municipality. During the administrative periods of mayors who preceded Joko Widodo, these public offices were those typical buildings that were designed mainly based on the functional and technical aspects. Nevertheless, each building had a special feature, a public meeting room with roof called *joglo*. This particular type of roof was adopted from that of traditional Javanese architecture.

Rehabilitation and rebuilding of public offices gave the Solo Municipality the opportunity to bring out the local architectural character. A benefit of the philosophy and practical models of architectural conservation is a potential contribution to sustainability, including safeguarding local distinctiveness, the reuse of building and the recycling materials, as well as the use of locally sourced building materials and craft skills (Rodwell, 2007). In fact, through rehabilitation, refurbishment, selective clearance and reconstruction of obsolete structures, as well as infill development, the new buildings will supposedly offer a contribution to physical and visual improvements over the earlier urban form and townscape in an urban quarter (Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath, 1996). Nevertheless, profound observation and research are required in order to identify precisely an historic quarter's particular spatial character, since the spirit and character of the spatial containment varies from quarter to quarter (Orbaşlı, 2008).

#### 4.3. A Change of Financial Scheme

Prior to 2005, in each fiscal year Solo Municipality had set aside annual regular funds for the maintenance and renovation at the amount of two to three hundred million for each *kelurahan*. Although the fund seemed relatively little for each office's maintenance and repair, the total amount of the allocated funds was substantial. This funding came from the central, provincial and municipal governments.

However, Mayor Widodo did not agree upon this allocation scheme and decided to choose another way. He argued, with such relatively small funds received by each office, there would not become visible results. Moreover, without a clear plan, the funds would be wasted. Therefore, he believed that the best way was to make an integrated concept by designing the space based on present and future needs with a good quality. The design and construction budget should be wisely planned and spent. Then, for its implementation, the available funds were disbursed per fiscal year for three *kelurahan*, while the others had to wait for their turn in the following fiscal years.<sup>i</sup> When Joko Widodo was re-elected for the second time as Mayor of Solo, the Municipality of Solo continued the implementation of this scheme.

#### 4.4. Communication during Design Process

In an historic city like Solo, where a detailed guideline for new development that strengthens the architectural and historic urban character was not yet in place, intensive communications among stakeholders became essential. The new building of the *kelurahan* offices in Solo was the result of a long design process. The consultants came to the mayor's office for design presentation as many as 6 to 7 times. The mayor wanted to make sure that the character and details of Javanese architecture be clearly visible, particularly *joglo*, as the focal point. Only until the design reached as expected, then it proceeded to the stage of the tender process up to the implementation of the development.<sup>ii</sup>

Intensive communications and dialogues between community and preservation interests and the project architect will lead to good design in an historic context, even without explicit guidelines. These processes have generally resulted in improvements to the design of buildings in an historic context. Through such communication, local authority planning department will be able to control any form of development, including a change of use (Orbaşlı, 2008).



Figures 1, 2, and 3

Several kelurahan offices that has been rehabilitated and rebuilt, Penumping (1) and Timuran (2), and is under construction, Punggawan (3)

## 5. Conclusions

Conservation policies, including rehabilitation and new development, should ideally be integrated with local town plans. Harmony between new buildings with the surroundings can be achieved through an appropriate design approach, that new design should be respectful and sensitive to the historic setting.

Through the rehabilitation and rebuilding of public offices *kelurahan*, Solo has demonstrated a preliminary effort to improve the city's cultural identity and local architectural character. By switching the financial scheme, Mayor Joko Widodo dealt with the limited maintenance and repair budget. Due to the absence of detailed guideline for conservation in Solo at that time, intensive communications among stakeholders, particularly between city planning authority and architectural consultants, became essential. The case of Solo demonstrated how the mayor led the dialogue during the design process.

This process helped the city to produce a design that was attempted to improve its urban visual character as an historic city. However, each urban neighbourhood must have a particular quality or uniqueness. Therefore, deep and intense research and observation prior to the design process are necessary to capture each district's spirit and historic value as well as architectural and spatial character; without which merely a cliché generic design will be produced.

A design guideline that is derived from an integrated city plan is crucial for Solo. This document will recommend key principles for new design in historic settings that is useful to the local authority, architects, clients, developers, practitioners, and so on.

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<sup>i</sup>An interview with Head of Local Development Planning Agency Mr Agus Joko Witiarso, by Author, at Balaikota, Surakarta, 8 July 2014. He explained IDR 200 million for 51 kelurahan would sum up to more than 10 billion rupiahs. On the other hand, for one time rehabilitation and rebuilding for each would cost about two to three billion rupiahs. Therefore, in one fiscal year, the programme for two to three kelurahan would be completed efficiently. This programme was continued when the Deputy Mayor FX Rudyatmoko succeeded Mr Jokowi who became elected as Governor of Jakarta Province in September 2012.

<sup>ii</sup>An interview with former Assistant for Government, Secretariat of Solo City, Mrs Sri Suharyati, by Author, at her residence, Surakarta, 4 November 2014.