

The Role of GeMaSPeKoLa in Supporting the Preservation of Semarang Old Town

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Abstract: The local government of Semarang City has made an effort to preserve all of its historic assets to sustain the local value of the city and has registered for the city to become a World Heritage Site. It has invited local people to participate in these conservation activities. The impetus for this has come from the degradation of Old Town, especially due to the disregard for the preservation of old buildings as they are transitioned into commercial use, where the old facades have not been maintained. This research discusses the management of Old Town through the optimisation of the role that the GeMaSPeKoLa plays and finds suitable strategies for increasing public participation in conservation. Using a descriptive method, the research details the role of the GeMaSPeKoLa as a social community movement concerned with the preservation of Old Town. This kind of social forum strengthens the local public's participation in the preservation activities and helps to prepare Old Town for becoming a World Heritage Site. Through observation and in-depth interviews, the role of the GeMaSPeKoLa in reducing the problems facing preservation are explored. This research builds a strategy to optimise the role of the GeMaSPeKoLa in the preservation activities supporting Old Town becoming World Heritage listed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Old Town, as one of Semarang City's assets, along with a number of high-value historical buildings, demands serious handling, not only from the government of Semarang, but also from the community. It is necessary to make an effort to preserve the historical value of Semarang City, especially considering Old Town is currently proposed as a World Heritage Site and an international tourism destination that is capable of generating revenue locally.

Old Town is continuously undergoing change, mostly due to construction in the region failing to conserve traditional aspects. Therefore, the Semarang City Government needs to work with the community to preserve Old Town so that it can keep the architectural value of its ancient buildings. [Catanese and Snyder \(1979\)](#) say that the activities of preservation and conservation of historic buildings are an integral part of urban planning. The preservation and conservation of historic buildings is also essentially closely linked to three important matters: (a) the historical development of the city, (b) the old town's historical area or environment, and (c) the diverse

context of "urban architecture" and the architectural style of old historic buildings. Therefore, in preservation and conservation activities there is always a common thread through the relics of architectural work that reflect the cultural values of the communities of the past.

In managing the old urban area, a site of cultural heritage and home to many artifacts, the city government needs to be especially careful with prescribed the forms of preservation and maintenance of objects of historical-cultural value ([Pawitro, 2015](#)). Preservation and conservation activities for old buildings with historical value can be packaged and targeted within historical old town areas. The city government's focus on this activity appreciates: (a) the architectural value of old buildings; (b) the historical and cultural values of the city; (c) the value of education, particularly for future generations; and (e) the benefits from tourism and recreation within the city.

Community participation in the conservation of cultural heritage is also a priority for the utilization of cultural heritage sites. According to [Suwannarat \(2015\)](#), public participation is a social process where people can act as stakeholders and be involved in, influence, or decide upon public issues. The level of participation can vary, and the level of public representation reflects not only the importance of the issue but also the social ecology - the structure and quality of life in a community. Participation is interestingly defined by [Suwannarat \(2015\)](#) through the concept of the ladder metaphor, in full the "ladder of citizen participation", where the height of the ladder reflects the quality of participation; the ladder has eight different levels that illustrate the steps of how people participate in a public issue in varied density depending on their personal authority.

The community refers to an entity composed of different groups interacting through a certain mode in a certain region ([Healey, 1998](#)). Every community has its own interests and role in the city and society, which usually determines the way its development aligns with its goals. Community participation usually refers to a policy-making process of official or unofficial cooperation among the professionals, family members, community organizations, and administrative officials ([Healey, 1998](#)). The achievement of community participation is in its awakening of the community spirit of local residents. The sense of community is the precondition for community participation, and this participation can encourage residents to deeply consider how to combine their personal interests with the future of their society and economy, thereby improving the quality of the community participation.

The current problem results from citizens' lack of awareness or care for the preservation and protection of the Old Town area as a conservation asset. An illustrative example of this is that some of the ancient buildings in the Old Town have undergone transformations in their function and façade, where they have been sold by their owners to become cafes, restaurants, and other business. Some were left damaged, badly maintained, and dirty. Local government did not provide a good enough conservation incentive to the owners of old buildings, which meant they did not have enough funding for maintenance. Therefore, community participation is a priority for all conservation of cultural heritage assets.

Conservation efforts must increase public awareness about the existence and importance of cultural heritage buildings and assets so that citizens can be more aware and involved in the participation of conservation activity. Community participation and efforts in cultural heritage preservation tend to be similarly dynamic. Community participation is capable of mobilizing

resources as needed ([Hall, 1999](#)), while preserving cultural reserves is a process of accepting environmental change. Thus, community participation in the conservation of cultural heritage is a process of community involvement in the effort to maintain the existence of cultural heritage. According to ([Sullivan & Mackay, 2012](#)), there are several stages in the preservation of cultural heritage:

1. The identification and description of cultural heritage sites.
2. The interpretation of cultural heritage sites.
3. Planning and making policies on preservation of cultural heritage.
4. The implementation of established policies.

The roles of government include to protect and supervise the community in the direction of all conservation activities, to ensure that they do not stray from the applicable conservation laws. Various groups have formed around community conservation movements for Old Town. In this research, all of the community conservation movements are referred to as GeMaSPeKoLa (*Gerakan Masyarakat Peduli Kota Lama*). The GeMaSPeKoLa have already conducted many activities and movements to conserve and preserve Old Town. These activities were aimed at increasing the awareness of the whole community, in order to work together to realise Old Town as a World Heritage Site. The role of Old Town's community conservation movement (GeMaSPeKoLa) is very important in supporting the government's efforts to preserve Old Town and the surrounding environment as one of the world's tourism destinations.

To further the understanding of the role of GeMaSPeKoLa and look for suitable strategies to increase the level of participation of GeMaSPeKoLa in preserving and conserving Semarang Old Town, the following research looks at community participation in public issues, and the community group as a participant in conservation activities, in the context of the Semarang Old Town heritage site.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach using an exploratory case study method. An explorative case study is a method that emphasizes the exploration of a case study in order to know the basics of problems facing conservation and facilitate researchers to find significant ways to reduce problems. This study also aims to describe the interaction between phenomena associated with individuals, the community and institutions in the conservation of Old Town. The following steps were taken:

1. Data were categorised into primary and secondary data. Primary data included information about the role of community groups concerned with Old Town conservation. The respondents were local people, academics, members of Old Town Conservation Group, and conservation experts. In-depth interviews were conducted. Secondary data was taken from references, documentation, and visual observation. In the visual observation, the researcher acted as an independent observer, free to observe, examine, and take measurements. According to [Mulyadi \(2014\)](#), visual observation is very good for understanding the composition and shape of a city, and to evaluate its potential and shortcomings.

2. An in-depth analysis of data from various sources was carried out.

3. The findings of a triangulation analysis was matched with the described theories according to their theoretical background, in order to discover the main characteristics of the role of GeMaSPeKoLa.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conservation experts define conservation through various perspectives on the concept of preservation that focus on different implications. The term conservation commonly used by architects refers to the 1981 Charter of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) known as the Burra Charter. The Burra Charter mentions that "*conservation is the concept of the process of managing a place or space or object so that the cultural meaning contained therein is well preserved*". This needs to be expanded more specifically to include the maintenance of morphology (physical form) and its function. Conservation activities include all maintenance activities in accordance with local conditions and situations as well as development efforts for further utilization. When associated with the area, the conservation of the Old Town in Semarang City and other sub-sections of the city include an attempt to prevent the activities of social change and inappropriate physical and non-physical utilization of the space.

A conservation program should not only be maintained for its authenticity and maintenance, but must consider other benefits, such as the economic value it brings to the owner or citizens, and these other considerations are fundamental to the goal of the dynamic preservation concept. In this case, the role of the architect is to determine the appropriate function because not all functions can be utilized. These activities require cross-sectoral, multi-dimensional, disciplined, and sustainable efforts. While preservation is an attempt to preserve cultural heritage for posterity, as historians have said, the present and the future is the past of the next generation ([Wirastari & Suprihardjo, 2012](#)).

Semarang Old Town, a unique cultural heritage site in Semarang City, has been proposed as a World Heritage Site. The Old Town of Semarang is located in the northern Semarang subdistrict. The boundaries of Semarang Old Town are as follows: in the north is Merak Street with its Tawang station; in the east is Cendrawasih Road; to the South is Sendowo Street; and to the west area is Mpu Tantular Street and the Semarang River.

The Old Town of Semarang is about 0.3125 km². Semarang Old Town is locally known as Little Nederland because it was formerly inhabited by Dutch people. It began to develop into its identity as Semarang Old Town in 1741. The European region began as office buildings and warehouses and later developed into a center of culture and trade with many hotels, elite housing, and other new buildings. The fundamental feature of a European Village is the art deco architecture of the buildings ([Hendro, 2015](#)).

Like other cities under Dutch colonial rule, a fort was built as a military centre. This fort has a pentagonal shape and was first built on the west side of Semarang Old Town. The fort has one gate on its south side and five watchtowers. As the Dutch settlement began to grow on the east side of the "Vijfhoek" fort, many houses, churches and office buildings were built in the settlement, which later developed into Semarang Old Town. This settlement is known as "de Europeeshe Buurt" and the architecture and urban planning of the settlement bears resemblance to urban planning and architecture in the Netherlands. Semarang River was also built up to resemble canals in the

Netherlands. At that time, the Viffjhoek Fort remained separate from the Dutch settlement.

With its many colonial buildings, Semarang Old Town was planned as the centre of the Dutch colonial government after the signing of an agreement between Mataram and the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) on January 15th, 1678. Life inside the Fort was well developed and new buildings started to appear. The Dutch colonial government built a new Christian church called the "Emmanuel" church (now known as "Gereja Blenduk"). To the north of the Fort was built a military command centre to defend the fort.

In 1824, the gate and the watchtower of this fort began to be demolished. The Dutch and other Europeans started to occupy the settlement around Bojong Road (now Pemuda Street) and Semarang Old Town grew into a small city. During Governor General Daendels time (1808-1811), post roads (Postweg) were built between Anyer and Panarukan. The "de Heerenstraat" street (now the Let Jend Suprpto Street) became part of the post road ([van Lier, 1928](#)).

A quarter of a century after the end of the VOC, Dutch settlements began to expand to Bojong Road, westward (along Daendels Street) and along Mataram Road. By the 20th century, Old Town grew rapidly and many trading offices, banks, insurance offices, notaries, hotels and shops were built. On the eastern side of the Blenduk Church, an open field was built for military parades or musical performances held in the afternoon ([van Velsen, 1931](#)).

The Old Town area of Semarang was designed in a European style, both structurally and aesthetically. This area has a centralized pattern with government buildings and Blenduk Church at its centre. The pattern of urban design is the same as in European cities, while the character and uniqueness of the architecture can be seen in the building details, ornaments, and decorative elements of the buildings. This European architecture brings a sense of architectural diversity to Central Java and the surrounding areas, and in turn enriches the architectural treasures of the country.

However, until now, efforts to improve the quality of the buildings and environment in Semarang Old Town area have not been optimised. With the increasing connectivity and mobility of modernization, the reasons for conservation have multiplied and are frequently changing ([Mo & Wang, 2014](#)). The analysis of GeMaSPeKoLa's role in the conservation of Semarang Old Town will be an attempt at exploring patterns and activities of community groups, which should help to refine the ideal model of public participation in conservation activities.

Semarang City Government has made efforts to preserve existing cultural heritage buildings by revitalizing Semarang Old Town with the enactment of Local Regulation No. 16 (2003) on Old Town Building and Environment Planning. These efforts have more subtle benefits for the public, however, there are also efforts to pave the Old Town streets, install old-fashioned street lights and utilise Tawang embankment as a place of recreation. As the Old Town acted as the centre of government and trade in the past, it can be used again as a landmark of Semarang City.

The government is embracing citizen involvement in conservation activities and placing them at the core of conservation, stating that local communities and other agents should actively participate in conserving Old Town, which, as a model, is a first for community-level conservation, but has in fact been adopted in other fields. Local government instituted a traditional market held inside the Old Town area, which sees many people

selling antiques and other old items. To support government programs related to conservation, communities initiated the Old Town Conservation Movement (Gerakan Masyarakat Peduli Kota Lama or GeMaSPeKoLa). This movement was a reaction to the following:

1. The Old Town environment was decreasing in quality.
2. Many ancient buildings were damaged and abandoned.
3. Some buildings have been transformed into modern buildings.
4. Most of the people do not understand the old building conservation rules properly.
5. High level of criminality.

However, the GeMaSPeKoLa was formed as a volunteer group and still receives subsidies from the government through annual project proposals. Community-based organisations often also coordinate with their respective committees, which implement new policies to do social entrepreneurial projects as well as to sustain the conservation movements, and hope to have a more effective impact, at a higher level. To guarantee its success, formal government guidance is needed, which could be an ordinary Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), followed by the establishment of new related regulation.

The public awareness about conservation activities in Semarang Old Town area has accelerated since the government announced that Semarang Old Town would be proposed as a World Heritage Site. People have agreed to support and execute the conservation activities and have been willing to act together with local government and academic experts. On the other hand, based on the field surveys, some communities are still not aware of preservation and conservation activities in Semarang Old Town, which means that the preservation activities of Semarang Old Town have not been run optimally, however, while only partial, encumbered, and poorly organised, the community participation in the preservation of the city's heritage needs to be widely and sustainably supported by the Semarang City Government and the academic society (University). This means that local government and academic experts should continuously provide technical assistance to local people's conservation activities, towards the goal of its becoming a World Heritage Site.

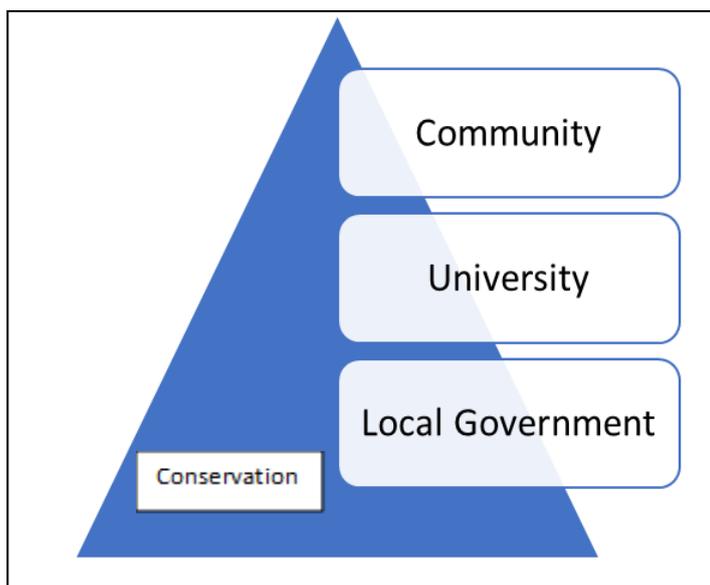


Figure 1. Three pillars of actors in the conservation of Old Town

Currently, in Old Town itself, a lot of activities have been used to revive Semarang Old Town as a historical tourism destination. These activities have mostly been held by communities, academics, and the city government. The city government has long been proactively working to mitigate the Old Town degradation. They issued Local Regulation No. 8 (2003) on Old Town Building and Environment. However, despite the existing regulations, the condition of the old Old Town area is still worsening due to minimal enforcement of the law. The city government, academics, and citizens should be more active in the development of Semarang Old Town employing strategies actively and continuously, which should optimally incorporate the participation of the Semarang public. This is structurally described in the following figure:

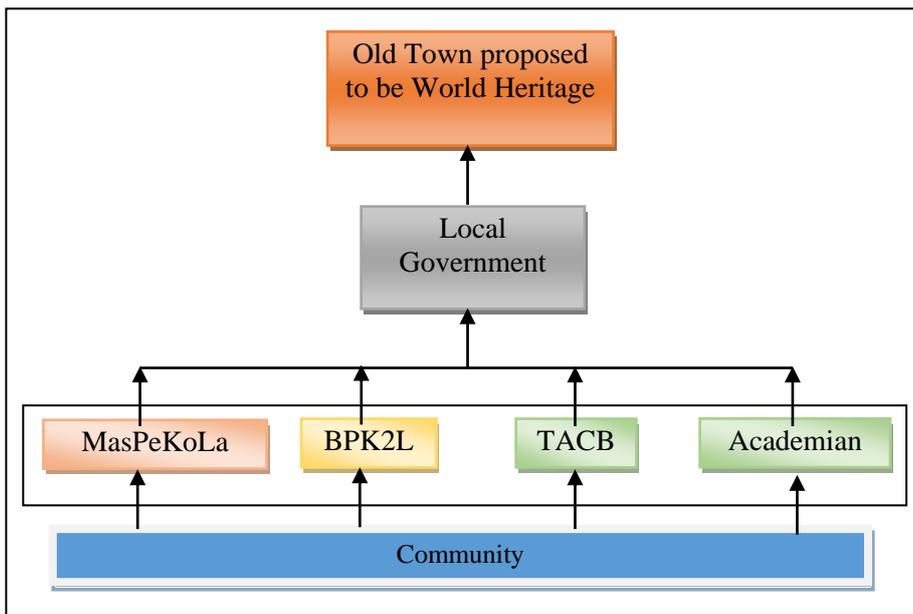


Figure 2. All Groups of Participants in the Conservation of Old Town

MasPeKola is an abbreviation of Masyarakat Peduli Kota Lama (Community that cares for Old Town), BPK2L is Badan Pengelola Kawasan Kota Lama (Old Town Conservation Board) and TACB is Tim Ahli Cagar Budaya (Cultural Heritage Expert Team). Most of their members are from the community that care about the conservation and preservation of Semarang Old Town. They are supporting the local government to prepare Semarang Old Town to become a World Heritage Site. The preservation of the city's heritage needs to be more intensively socialized to the wider public as a synergistic activity, in order to produce social, economic, and cultural benefits for collective life that is not merely documented. Furthermore, it is necessary to have a large-scale official announcement of this conservation effort, emphasizing citizen participation. In the Old Town itself there is the community-led Old Town Conservation Movement (GeMasPeKoLa) pioneered by citizens who were aware of the importance of revitalizing the Semarang Old Town, and beyond that are parties aiming to produce a better cultural heritage area. Ten years ago, events called Denting Dawai and Kota Tua were held, playing concert music in several buildings in the Old Town area. The organizer of the event, trying to revitalize Old Town, was optimistic about the pulse of life in the region, however, after several concerts, the event stalled and Old Town was quiet again. In the past three or

four years, there has been a renewed effort to revive the dozens of colonial heritage buildings. According to records, the preservation of Old Town was begun in 1995 by an architect. Until the early 2000s, they encouraged the people and government to reorganize Old Town, beginning with an Old Town Foundation, however, this architect then abandoned their efforts, along with those conservation plans.

After that, other communities that care about Old Town began to appear. The current preservation movements of the last few years can be understood as a new form; these movements are spearheaded by communities who are aware of the importance of safeguarding the area. At the same time, the role of communities such as *Oase*, *Lopen*, *Kokakola*, *Orartoret* and others have been significant in bringing the Old Town area to life. They have repeatedly held activities at places in the Old Town area, including regularly scheduled events for people to come and enjoy. *Oens* Semarang Foundation also played a major role through the Old Town Festival with the Sentiling Market (candlelight market) theme. The theme was taken from the *Koloniaale Tendoostiling* event which was held one hundred years ago in the city of Semarang. They are determined to achieve the status of World Heritage Site by 2020. The following image shows the relationship of these groups:

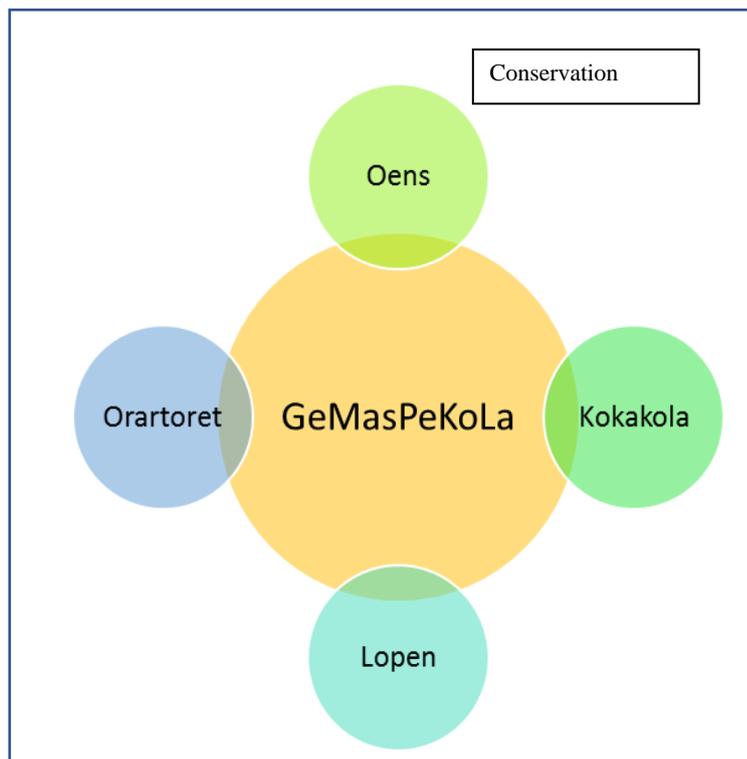


Figure 3. Community Groups of Old Town Conservation

Likewise, *AMBO* is a community group consisting of building owners in Semarang Old Town that have started a movement to preserve the area. Their buildings vary, ranging from empty buildings to buildings that have been preserved and transitioned into commercial buildings. The role of *AMBO* includes discussing the problems that Old Town faces, finding solutions, and communicating those solutions to the people of Semarang Old Town. For example, if there is blocked drainage, *AMBO* plays a role in mobilizing residents of Semarang City to work together to fix it. In this way *AMBO* has contributed greatly to the preservation of Old Town.

Regarding the above matter, the community activities should include disseminating the rules of building conservation, so that the owners of old buildings can renovate or reuse their buildings appropriately. Mentoring is also necessary, especially when a resident renovates an old building, for supervision and guidance during the renovation process in order to follow the conservation rules. *AMBO* also acts as a bridge between residents and other Old Town communities. People's concern for Old Town is also felt by the architect members of "Sketcher". These community groups consist of architecture students from many universities, professional architects, architecture lecturers, and other communities. They often hold drawing events for old buildings in Semarang Old Town and many other places outside of Old Town. They usually exhibit these drawings in Semarang Art Gallery and upload them to social media. These activities then attract new people into those kinds of activities.

On the other hand, a main constraint in encouraging local people to become involved in the GeMaSPeKoLa is lack of knowledge about conservation principles, which has meant that development of the Old Town area often continues based on individual perceptions about conservation. Another problem is the lack of systematic planning from GeMaSPeKoLa, an important aspect of public participation that is often overlooked. Systematic planning can lead to fruitful projects, but there is no systematic planning for people's participation in conservation development, which is a leading reason that these groups do not achieve the expected conservation targets set by local government.

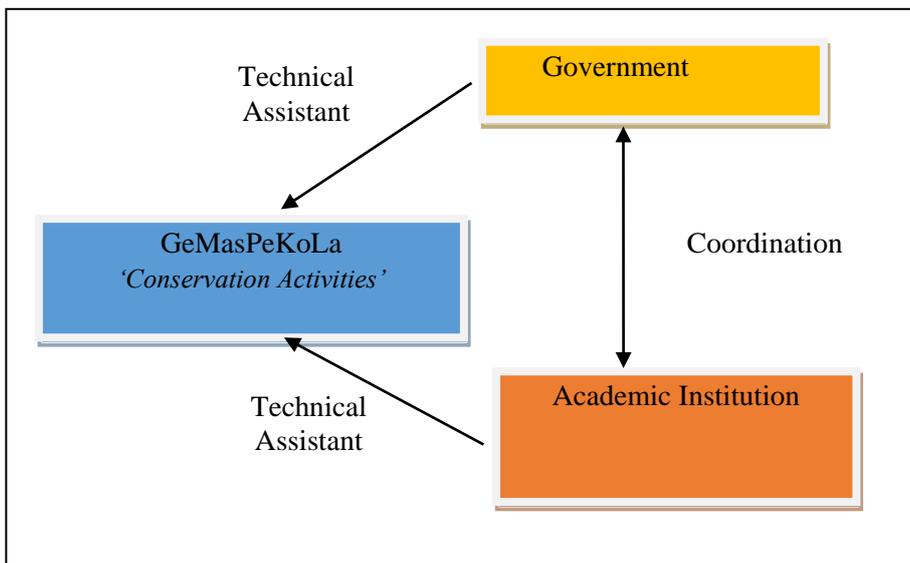


Figure 4. Increasing GeMasPeKoLa participation in conserving Old Town

Based on the above analysis, it could be said that the proper strategy to increase community group participation in the preservation of Semarang Old Town would include the following:

1. Providing technical assistance to community groups through local government and academic institutions.
2. Providing consultation to local people regarding conservation and preservation.
3. Supporting any activities related to Old Town conservation through local government and academic institutions.

4. Supporting the existing community group (GeMaSPeKoLa) through funding. Integrating community group activities with conservation development projects in Old Town to involve people in the area, supporting the conservation development of Old Town and bringing employment opportunities.

5. Empowering the participation of groups to engage in conservation and preservation efforts, and to enabling people to better manage and negotiate with existing conservation development systems, empowering local people to make decisions using their resources, knowledge and skills.

6. Increasing the sustainability of GeMaSPeKoLa conservation and preservation movements, guaranteeing the future of conservation activities and preparing the new model of Semarang Old Town as a World Heritage Site.

4. CONCLUSION

Community-led Old Town Conservation movements (GeMaSPeKoLa) play a significant role in the Semarang Old Town preservation efforts. Under their management, conservation activities can run optimally, supported by government and academics. To encourage more community participation in Old Town Conservation movements, the government should incentivise the movements to continue their conservation activities and attract more community involvement in the conservation of Semarang Old Town. Moreover, to expand community participation and empower its participants, the government should strategically allow community innovation of different working models at each working step. While it is quite difficult, the challenge is to spread the perspectives and knowledge of heritage, conservation and community rehabilitation to other communities, and to encourage future generations of residents to pursue the same efforts, with the aim of sustaining the historical value of Old Town.

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