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ABSTRACT

The Semarang Port area is a maritime space holding historical, social, and cultural significance for the development of Semarang City. While preservation efforts previously focused primarily on protecting physical buildings or sites, the approach has now shifted toward a value-based model. These values are derived from an analysis that integrates tangible cultural heritage with intangible cultural elements. This study aims to reconstruct the maritime cultural landscape of the Semarang Port area, analyze its associated tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and examine preservation efforts. It employs a qualitative research design utilizing historical and cultural anthropology approaches. Data were gathered through observation, interviews, literature reviews, and documentation, and were analyzed descriptively. The findings indicate that the port area serves not only as a hub for economic activity but also shapes the community's maritime identity through historic buildings, traditions, and ongoing cultural practices. Preserving the area requires an integrated approach that combines the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage with community participation to ensure the sustainability of the maritime cultural landscape.

Keywords: Maritime Cultural Landscape, Semarang Port, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Anthropology, Area Preservation.

INTRODUCTION

The conservation of historic areas has undergone a fundamental paradigm shift over the past several decades. Whereas preservation efforts previously focused primarily on protecting physical buildings or sites, the approach has increasingly shifted toward a value-based perspective (Avrami et al., 2000; Mason, 2002). This development in scholarship emphasizes that historic spaces can no longer be separated from the concept of the cultural landscape, namely spaces continuously shaped through dynamic

interactions among people, environmental conditions, and social practices (Taylor & Lennon, 2011; UNESCO, 2008). In other words, historic spaces need to be understood as cultural landscapes formed through sustained interactions between people, the environment, and social practices. This perspective positions cultural heritage not merely as a material remnant of the past, but also as a representation of collective memory (*lieux de mémoire*) (Nora, 1989), community identity, and social dynamics that continue to evolve over time (Smith, 2006).

Within coastal areas, ports constitute highly dynamic cultural spaces. Historically, ports have served not only as infrastructural nodes for the exchange of economic commodities within maritime civilizations, but also as maritime cultural landscapes where people, technology, and the marine environment intersect (Westerdahl, 2011). In their development, ports may be viewed as "contact zones" that facilitate transportation and intensive encounters among groups with different ethnicities, religions, languages, and knowledge systems (Pratt, 1991), whose interactions directly or indirectly generate cultural values expressed in both tangible and intangible forms.

The sustained cross-cultural interactions among diverse ethnic groups in port areas have encouraged processes of hybridization and acculturation (Bhabha, 1994), thereby shaping coastal communities characterized by openness, cosmopolitanism, and cultural identities distinct from those of inland communities (Pearson, 2008; Sutherland, 2021). Consequently, the historical significance of port areas is not confined to tangible architectural remains, but is also manifested in oral traditions, social practices, and collective memories continuously reproduced by local communities as intangible heritage (Smith, 2006).

Semarang represents one of the principal port-city formations on the north coast of Java (*Pesisir*), exhibiting highly complex morphological and historical dynamics. Spatially and geographically, the development of the area reflects the concept of the urban palimpsest, or the accumulation of layered spaces (Corboz, 1983), beginning with the formation of Bergota Port as a consequence of geomorphological dynamics and river-mouth sedimentation (Bird, 1971). Historically, Semarang Port evolved from a trading node during the Ancient Mataram period, underwent political and religious transformation during the Sultanate of Demak, and eventually developed into a complex modern administrative and economic center under Dutch colonial rule (Lombard, 1996; Pratiwo, 2010). Consistent with the concept of the Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia

(Reid, 1993), these developments transformed the Semarang port area into not only an economic node but also an arena for the formation of cosmopolitan social networks through the articulation of trade, governance, and multiethnic acculturation involving Chinese, Arab, Malay, and European communities. The traces of this evolution have been continuously recorded through both tangible spatial structures, such as architecture and urban form, and intangible practices maintained by coastal communities to the present day.

The Semarang Port area constitutes a tangible manifestation of a living cultural space that harmoniously integrates material or physical dimensions (tangible) with immaterial or non-physical dimensions (intangible) (Poulios, 2014; Vecco, 2010). In accordance with Lefebvre's (1991) concept of the spatial triad, the character of the Semarang Port area is shaped not only by physical infrastructure and historic structures, such as the Willem III Lighthouse, Syahbandar Tower, Sleko Village, Semarang Gudang Station, the Perusda Building, and the sacred structure of the Sunan Terboyo Tomb, but is also brought to life through everyday social practices as manifestations of intangible culture. These include the Tambaklorok *Sedekah Laut*, the *Haul Sunan Terboyo*, and the *Banyu Pitu Dandan Segoro* ritual. This dialectical relationship is evident in the continuity of maritime traditions and local rituals that remain active today and function as mechanisms for harmonizing people, the marine environment, and historical memory (Steenbrink, 1993; UNESCO, 2003). The presence of these rituals and physical landmarks demonstrates that the identity of the Semarang Port area has been constructed through the continuous transmission of cultural values across generations. Within this process, architectural heritage derives its social significance and legitimacy from cultural practices that continue to be maintained by coastal communities (Smith, 2006).

The sustainability of the Semarang Port area is currently confronted with dual threats arising from ecological pressures and anthropogenic transformation. From a hydrogeomorphological perspective, tidal flooding (*rob*) and land subsidence place tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including heritage protected through formal designation as cultural heritage, under conditions of spatial vulnerability and recurring structural damage (Markham et al., 2016; Sesana et al., 2021). At the same time, increasing pressure from urban development and land commercialization has disrupted spatial functions and weakened community connections with historic spaces, resulting in

a loss of awareness of the places in which their collective cultural memories are embedded (Bandarin & van Oers, 2012; Harvey, 2008).

This critical condition cannot be addressed solely through conventional physical conservation approaches; rather, it requires comprehensive conservation. The preservation of coastal areas, including the Semarang Port area, therefore requires an integrated and adaptive conservation paradigm (*Adaptive Heritage Conservation*). Such an approach should combine disaster-risk mitigation, the protection of physical structures, the continuation of community social and cultural practices, and spatial-planning policies oriented toward environmental justice (Jigyasu, 2014; Pendlebury, 2008).

This condition demonstrates that area preservation cannot be adequately achieved through physical conservation alone. Instead, it requires an approach capable of simultaneously integrating historical, social, cultural, and policy dimensions. Numerous studies have examined the history of Semarang, its port, and the preservation of cultural heritage; however, most have focused separately on economic history, the development of the colonial city, or inventories of cultural heritage objects. Such approaches have not fully explained the dynamic relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage in shaping the port area as an integrated maritime cultural landscape. Consequently, the port area has more often been understood as a collection of historic objects rather than as a living space continuously produced through interactions among communities, their environment, and collective memory.

In response to these pressing conditions, this study comprehensively conceptualizes the Semarang Port area as a maritime cultural landscape (Westerdahl, 1992, 2011), positioning it as a dynamic cultural space shaped by the historical dialectic among maritime activities, trade networks, coastal social practices, and cultural preservation policies. This holistic framework enables an in-depth analysis of the integration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in sustaining the identity of the area (Poulios, 2014; UNESCO, 2003).

On the basis of this conceptual framework, the focus and research questions of this study are formulated around four principal dimensions: (1) What is the historical reconstruction of the Semarang Port area? (2) What is the relationship between the maritime cultural landscape and the formation of coastal community identity? (3) How are tangible and intangible cultural heritage integrated within the Semarang Port area?

and (4) What are the implications of this integration for the preservation of the Semarang Port area?

Based on these research questions, this study aims to reconstruct the maritime cultural landscape of the Semarang Port area by integrating perspectives from spatial history and cultural anthropology (Geertz, 1973; Westerdahl, 1992). It also aims to analyze the implementation of cultural heritage governance through protection, development, utilization, and capacity building, including education and community empowerment, as mandated by the national heritage-preservation framework to ensure the continuity of the area's cultural heritage (Republic of Indonesia, 2010; Smith, 2006).

Academically, this study is expected to provide a conceptual contribution to maritime history and cultural anthropology, particularly regarding how coastal spaces are historically produced and interpreted. Practically, the study aims to provide substantive references for stakeholders in formulating more integrated and adaptive policies for the preservation of historic areas, with an orientation toward environmental justice and community participation (Bandarin & van Oers, 2012; Pendlebury, 2008).

Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute conceptually to the development of maritime history and cultural anthropology while also serving as a reference for the formulation of more integrated policies for the preservation of historic areas.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholarship on historic areas has undergone a significant evolution from material conservation approaches toward Critical Heritage Conservation Studies. Early approaches treated cultural heritage primarily as physical objects and emphasized architectural authenticity (Avrami et al., 2000). Smith (2006) argues that cultural heritage is fundamentally a cultural process. Heritage is not a passive property of an object; rather, it involves social negotiation, the formation of collective memory, and the interpretation of the past in relation to present contexts (Harvey, 2001).

Within coastal areas, the concept of cultural space is further developed through the Maritime Cultural Landscape theory proposed by Westerdahl (1992, 2011). Westerdahl conceptualizes the maritime cultural landscape as an interconnected spatial network reflecting relationships between people and the marine environment, encompassing port networks, economic activities, coastal organization, and local maritime knowledge. Ports are therefore understood not merely as physical trade

infrastructure, but as arenas of social interaction, migration, and coastal identity formation.

Understanding historic areas requires the integration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as emphasized by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and examined by Vecco (2010). Physical structures acquire historical meaning when they are animated by social activities, rituals, and knowledge—the intangible dimensions of heritage—that take place within them. Separating these dimensions creates a dichotomy within the historical context and reduces the cultural value of dynamic port areas.

An anthropological interpretation of port spaces is grounded in Geertz's (1973) interpretive theory, which conceptualizes culture as webs of meaning transmitted through symbols and social action. Inclusive values within coastal communities—including tolerance, openness, and solidarity—develop as forms of socio-ecological adaptation to the dynamics of maritime life (Ingold, 2000).

This paradigm is also normatively consistent with Indonesia's national regulatory framework, particularly Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage. This law provides legal protection for tangible aspects of heritage, including objects, buildings, structures, sites, and areas, while Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture shifts the emphasis toward cultural preservation and utilization and positions communities as active subjects in the preservation of culture and its intangible dimensions (Republic of Indonesia, 2010, 2017).

The synthesis of these theoretical perspectives positions the Semarang Port area as a maritime cultural landscape that is continuously undergoing processes of development and transformation. Drawing on these perspectives, this study conceptualizes the Semarang Port area as a maritime cultural landscape in which maritime space functions as a cultural landscape (Westerdahl, 1992, 2011).

This construction emerged through complex historical articulations among maritime mobility, trade networks, waves of migration, and the adaptation of coastal cultural practices across different historical periods (Reid, 1993). This conceptual foundation provides a holistic framework for examining the dialectical relationship between tangible and intangible heritage while explaining how these dimensions jointly maintain the continuity of place identity into the contemporary era (Proshansky et al., 1983; UNESCO, 2003; Vecco, 2010). The theoretical framework therefore provides a

fundamental basis for examining historical dynamics, socio-cultural transformations, and the formulation of adaptive heritage-conservation strategies (*living heritage conservation*) for the Semarang Port area as an important node of Indonesia's maritime cultural heritage (Poulios, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative paradigm integrating the historical method with a cultural-anthropological approach (Burke, 2005; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This methodological combination was selected to bridge the diachronic dimension of chronological reconstruction with the synchronic dimension of spatial interpretation and cultural structures (Kuntowijoyo, 2008).

The historical method involved the stages of heuristics, source criticism—both external and internal—interpretation, and historiography (Gottschalk, 2006). Through these stages, the study reconstructs the physical and spatial development of the Semarang Port area. The cultural-anthropological perspective (Geertz, 1973) is employed to examine webs of social meaning and the dialectical relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This interdisciplinary integration enables a holistic analysis of spatial transformation, local cultural practices, and strategies for conserving the maritime cultural landscape as an interconnected systemic whole (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The research was conducted in the Semarang Port Area, Semarang City, Central Java Province. This location was selected due to its historical continuity—spanning from the development of Bergota Port to Tanjung Emas Port—and its retention of diverse cultural heritage elements reflecting maritime activities along Java's Northern Coast (*Pasisir*). Beyond hosting numerous historic structures, the area functions as a living space for coastal community traditions that persist to the present day.

Data sources encompass primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through field observations and in-depth interviews with key informants selected via purposive sampling based on their involvement in and knowledge of the area's history, social life, and heritage preservation. Informants included community leaders, site managers, cultural practitioners, and local residents residing around the port area. Field observations were conducted to assess the physical condition of the site, identify cultural heritage assets, and document ongoing socio-cultural activities. Secondary data were compiled through desk research of academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles,

archival documents, policy papers, government reports, and historical literature on Semarang's port development and heritage conservation.

Data collection was executed using four primary techniques: observation, interviews, documentation, and literature review. First, field observation provided empirical insights into spatial conditions and the interplay between tangible heritage sites and intangible cultural practices. Second, semi-structured interviews enabled informants to articulate their lived experiences, historical knowledge, and perspectives on local cultural practices. Third, documentation involved collecting historical photographs, maps, archives, and supporting records as visual and historical evidence. Fourth, literature review established historical context, strengthened field data interpretation, and contextualized empirical findings within existing scholarship.

Data analysis followed an interactive, continuous qualitative model as outlined by Miles, Huberman (2014) and Saldaña (2016), involving three main iterative phases:

1. **Data Condensation:** Raw data from ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, and archival documents were selected, focused, simplified, abstracted, and transformed (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Irrelevant data were eliminated while preserving the contextual complexity of the port area.
2. **Data Display:** Condensed data were organized into systematic analytical narratives. This display synthesized the chronological historical trajectory of the Semarang Port Area with the socio-cultural dynamics of the local coastal community (Yin, 2018).
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** Preliminary conclusions were drawn by critically interpreting structural patterns connecting tangible heritage, intangible traditions, and maritime spatiality. These conclusions were continuously verified through data triangulation to ensure robust findings regarding the formation of the Semarang Port Maritime Cultural Landscape.

To ensure qualitative credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed data source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data source triangulation involved cross-checking information across diverse sources, including interviews with community elders and historians, historical archives, official policy documents, and relevant secondary literature (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2015). Methodological triangulation verified data consistency by combining distinct data collection techniques: field observations, in-depth interviews, document

analysis, and archival research (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These strategies minimized researcher bias, verified empirical consistency, and enhanced the interpretive validity of the reconstructed maritime cultural landscape.

Through these methodological procedures, this study delivers a comprehensive historical reconstruction of the Semarang Port Area, clarifying how the interplay between tangible and intangible cultural heritage sustains a living maritime cultural landscape.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical findings reveal various surviving cultural heritage elements in the Semarang Port Area, encompassing both tangible structures and intangible cultural traditions. The surviving tangible heritage comprises buildings, structures, and sites reflecting past historical events. Concurrently, intangible heritage includes traditions, religious rituals, linguistic vernaculars, and folk practices maintained by coastal communities as expressions of their maritime identity. These findings document historical trajectories while demonstrating the endurance of local knowledge amid environmental degradation and urban modernization.

1. Sunan Terboyo Mosque and Tomb Site



Figure 1: Sunan Terboyo Gravestones (Personal Documentation, 2025)

The Sunan Terboyo Tomb is situated in Tambakrejo Village, Gayamsari District, Semarang City, adjacent to the Terboyo Grand Mosque along the strategic Kaligawe Highway (BPCB Jateng, 2020; Semarang City Culture and Tourism Office, 2021). The tomb structure exhibits coastal Javanese and syncretic Islamic architectural influences. The primary enclosure features a three-tiered *limasan* roof, while the gravestones are

sculpted from andesite stone adorned with ancient Arabic calligraphy. Despite undergoing several restorations, core original architectural elements have been preserved, maintaining the site's sacred and historical character (Handinoto, 2010; Pusat Dokumentasi Arsitektur, 2018; BPCB Jateng, 2020).

The site functions as a vibrant socio-religious center. On Thursday nights and Sundays, pilgrims from various regions gather, generating local economic activity through the sale of food, devotional items, flowers, and religious paraphernalia (Suharto, 2019). Pilgrims travel from Demak, Kudus, Pati, and Jepara, positioning the tomb as a crucial gathering node for coastal trading and fishing networks (Suharto, 2019).

Sunan Terboyo is interred behind the Terboyo Grand Mosque, constructed in 1821 CE. The mosque's architecture reflects design traditions associated with the Surakarta Sunanate, evident in its *mustaka* (finial), roof structure, and *cungkup*. Main teak support pillars (*saka guru*) and wall ornamentation have been maintained.



Figure 2: Front View of Terboyo Grand Mosque (Author's Documentation, 2025)



Figure 3: Tidal Flood Inundation in the Mosque Courtyard (Author's Documentation, 2025)

The mosque underwent renovations in 1967, 1970, and 1980 to address structural deterioration caused by recurrent tidal flooding (*rob*) (Handinoto, 2010; Pusat Dokumentasi Arsitektur, 2018; BPCB Jateng, 2020; Semarang City Culture and Tourism Office, 2021).

Currently, the site faces environmental threats from tidal inundation, coastal erosion, and urban expansion. Local residents actively maintain the site's physical cleanliness and sacred atmosphere through communal voluntary labor (*gotong royong*), particularly preceding the annual commemoration (*haul*) (Suharto, 2019; TACB Semarang City, 2022). Thus, the site integrates historical, social, economic, and spiritual dimensions. Beyond marking the historical spread of Islam in Semarang, it serves as a locus of collective memory uniting faith, history, and coastal livelihoods (Handinoto, 2010; Suharto, 2019).

Interviews with site custodians reveal that local fishermen continue to offer prayers at the tomb prior to seafaring or trading. The use of floral offerings and incense symbolizes ancestral reverence and safety prayers rather than mere magical ritualism (Interview with Tomb Custodian, 2025). These pilgrimage routines, communal prayers, and annual *haul* ceremonies demonstrate that the Sunan Terboyo Mosque and Tomb Site represents a living heritage site connecting physical structures with active cultural practices (TACB Semarang City, 2022).

2. Semarang Gudang Railway Station



Figure 4: Remaining Structure of Semarang Gudang Railway Station (Author's Documentation, 2025)

Semarang Gudang Railway Station in Kemijen represents an early landmark of Indonesia's railway development. The facility expanded following the commissioning of the Dutch East Indies' first railway line by the *Nederlandsch-Indische Spoorweg Maatschappij* post-1864 (Oegema, 1982; Reitsma, 1928). Unlike passenger terminals such as Tawang and Poncol, Semarang Gudang functioned primarily as a freight handling and storage hub for agricultural commodities prior to maritime export (IRPS, 2022; P2K STEKOM, 2024).

The building exemplifies utilitarian colonial warehouse architecture, featuring thick masonry walls, expansive access doors, elevated ceilings, and direct rail track integration connecting to the port and Bandarharjo warehouse district (IRPS, 2022). The station highlights the economic linkage between the agrarian hinterland and the maritime port under the colonial economic system. Commodities such as teak wood, rice, sugar, forest produce, and marine products were transported to Semarang before maritime shipment (Colombijn, 2014; Kwee, 2023; P2K STEKOM, 2024).

The station complex evolved into a socio-economic arena involving indigenous laborers, Ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs, and European managers. Warehouses, maintenance workshops, worker housing, and port facilities constituted an integrated industrial landscape (Colombijn, 2014; IRPS, 2022). Post-independence, the station's operational role declined due to logistics modernization and new port developments, culminating in its operational shutdown around 2007. Tidal flooding and land subsidence subsequently submerged sections of the tracks, damaging the structure and burying portions under sediment (IRPS, 2022; P2K STEKOM, 2024; JatimNetwork, 2023).



Figure 5: Side View of Semarang Gudang Station Present Condition (Author's Documentation, 2025)

Despite losing its primary economic function, the station remains embedded in community memory. The site serves as a pedestrian thoroughfare, while oral histories preserve memories of its operational heyday. Communal cleanup drives and prayer gatherings are periodically conducted to honor the history of port laborers (JatimNetwork, 2023). Semarang Gudang Station thus stands as an industrial artifact recording the nexus of transport, commerce, social stratification, and coastal working-class life.

3. Syahbandar Tower (Harbor Master Tower)



Figure 6: Restored Syahbandar Tower (Author's Documentation, 2025)

The Syahbandar Tower in Bandarharjo, North Semarang, was constructed in the mid-19th century by the Dutch colonial administration as part of maritime surveillance and customs control infrastructure (Kompas Regional, 2024). The tower monitored vessel movements and cargo handling around the river mouth connecting the port with inland waterways.

Its construction was linked to escalating trade volumes following the implementation of the Cultivation System (*Cultuurstelsel*). Semarang developed into a chief export outlet for plantation produce harvested from hinterland regions such as Ungaran, Salatiga, and Ambarawa. Located strategically in the Sleko area, the tower oversaw small craft carrying raw goods from interior waterways to deep-water anchorage (Kompas Regional, 2024).

Beyond technical surveillance, the tower fulfilled administrative functions, including vessel registration, cargo recording, and port duty collection. Its surroundings fostered interactions among colonial officials, European merchants, indigenous dockworkers, and local fishermen (Kompas Regional, 2024). Consequently, the tower reflects the socio-economic architecture of colonial port governance and the emergence of coastal labor solidarity.

Following the development of Tanjung Emas Port, operational reliance on the tower diminished. Nevertheless, local residents maintain the structure as a spatial landmark and an element of collective memory. Older generations utilize it as a spatial reference point, while urban historians view it as physical evidence of Semarang's maritime transition from a colonial harbor to a modern port city (Kompas Regional, 2024).

4. Willem III Lighthouse



Figure 7: Willem III Lighthouse (Semarang City Cultural Heritage Registry, 2022. cagarbudaya.semarangkota.go.id/page/halaman/45)

The Willem III Lighthouse was constructed between 1879 and 1884 as part of Semarang Port's modernization drive. Named after King Willem III, it reflects 19th-century colonial navigational engineering. Its construction responded to Semarang's growing role as Central Java's primary export gateway, necessitating enhanced maritime navigational safety (Merdeka.com, 2023).

Featuring a utilitarian cast-iron/steel framework typical of late 19th-century industrial design, the tower stands approximately 30–32 meters tall and was originally fitted with a Fresnel lens capable of projecting light up to 20 nautical miles. Its illumination system evolved from vegetable oil lamps to gas lighting and eventually electrical power (BanggaSemarang.id, 2022). The lighthouse formed an integral part of a comprehensive port system alongside canals, breakwaters, warehouses, and rail networks (Suara Merdeka, 2023).

Economically, Willem III supported maritime trade corridors linking Semarang with regional ports such as Batavia, Surabaya, and Makassar. Its establishment spurred the growth of surrounding fishing settlements, dockyards, fish processing hubs, and seafood trade networks (Merdeka.com, 2023; Suara Merdeka, 2023).

Despite advances in modern satellite navigation, the lighthouse remains active as a secondary navigational aid. The structure faces ecological pressures from tidal inundation, coastal erosion, and land subsidence (Kumparan, 2023). Locally referred to as the "Dutch Tower" (*Menara Belanda*), it is perceived as a symbol of maritime safety and coastal continuity. Local communities and academic groups conduct educational and

preservation initiatives, maintaining Willem III as a living heritage monument possessing dual technical and socio-cultural functionality (Suara Merdeka, 2023; Kumparan, 2023).

5. Kampung Sleko



Figure 8: Contemporary Streetscape of Kampung Sleko (Author's Documentation, 2025)

Kampung Sleko is an historic urban settlement in North Semarang that evolved alongside the Old Port. From the 18th to the 19th century, it served as a residential neighborhood for dockworkers, merchants, and mariners from across the Indonesian archipelago, including Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Ternate (Rukayah & Abdullah, 2020). Its proximity to the harbor positioned it as a vibrant intercultural contact zone among Javanese, Ethnic Chinese, Arab, and Malay communities, an heritage visible in its vernacular architecture, linguistic idioms, spatial morphology, and social practices (IDN Times Jateng, 2023).

Sleko was directly integrated into international commodity networks. Warehouses storing spices, teak lumber, and cash crops lined the neighborhood, while residents were employed in stevedoring, lighterage, and maritime service trades. Dwellings doubled as commercial spaces, net repair yards, and maritime workshops (Rukayah & Abdullah, 2020).

The neighborhood also functioned as a space for communal and religious cohesion. Traditions such as *Maulid Nabi*, fishermen's *tahlilan*, and mutual assistance practices reinforced social solidarity (IDN Times Jateng, 2023). During the Indonesian National Revolution, its coastal access made Sleko a strategic corridor for maritime logistics and resistance movements (Rukayah & Abdullah, 2020).

Modern urban growth has altered port operations without erasing Sleko's historic identity. Municipal authorities and community groups have spearheaded revitalization efforts—including public murals, cultural exhibitions, street festivals, and creative economy initiatives—to preserve historical structures (IDN Times Jateng, 2023). Persistent cultural practices, including maritime symbolic art and religious study circles (*pengajian*), demonstrate how domestic spaces continue to serve as social and spiritual arenas (Rukayah & Abdullah, 2020). Sleko has thus evolved from a colonial labor enclave into a cultural heritage neighborhood bridging historical memory and contemporary urban life.

6. Vereenigde Javasche Houthandel Maatschappij Building (Perusda)



Figure 9: Archival View of the Vereenigde Javasche Houthandel Maatschappij Building (Semarang Cultural Heritage Registry, 2022, https://cagarbudaya.semarangkota.go.id/page/halaman/58)



Figure 10: Contemporary Front Elevation of the Perusda Building (Author's Documentation, 2025)



Figure 11: Rear Elevation Showing Structural Deterioration (Author's Documentation, 2025)

The structure currently known as the Central Java Perusda Building originally housed the *Vereenigde Javasche Houthandel Maatschappij*, a major Dutch timber enterprise specializing in teak processing and export. Built in the early 20th century, the facility served as administrative offices, timber yards, and processing workshops prior to maritime shipment via Semarang Port (Radar Semarang, 2022).

Teak harvested from interior forests was transported by rail to the port zone for grading and maritime export. The building constituted a key node in colonial commodity extraction connecting inland natural resources with world markets. Labor organization mirrored colonial racial hierarchies: indigenous workers performed manual logistics and stevedoring, whereas European staff managed administrative and supervisory roles (Merdeka.com, 2023; Radar Semarang, 2022).

Architecturally, the building exhibits tropical adaptive design, featuring thick load-bearing masonry walls, high-ceilinged interiors, and broad louvered windows for natural ventilation. Following Indonesian independence, the building was nationalized and assigned to the Central Java Regional State-Owned Enterprise (Perusda). At present, the structure is severely degraded; portions of the roof have collapsed, and several wings remain abandoned (Merdeka.com, 2023).

Despite physical decay, the building retains socio-cultural significance. Local residents refer to it as the "Dutch Timber Office" (*Kantor Kayu Belanda*), using it as a landmark. Heritage organizations and photography groups frequently document the site. Proposed adaptive reuse projects aim to convert the structure into a creative public space, illustrating how colonial industrial architecture can be re-functionalized for community empowerment and cultural education (Radar Semarang, 2022; Merdeka.com, 2023).

7. Sedekah Laut (Sea Offering Ceremony)



Figure 12: Ceremonial Offerings (Sesajen) for the Sea Offering Ritual (Author's Documentation, 2025)



Figure 13: Ceremonial Offering Raft (Bangkrak Sesaji) Prepared for Launching (Author's Documentation, 2025)

Sedekah Laut Tambaklorok is an ancestral maritime tradition practiced by coastal residents of Semarang as an expression of gratitude for marine bounties and safety at sea. Held annually, the festival incorporates communal prayers, Qur'anic recitations (*khataman*), *istighatsah* supplications, and a ritual procession launching sacrificial offerings (*larung sesaji*) into the sea (Antara News, 2025; RRI, 2023). Suhartono, a senior Tambaklorok fisherman, notes that the ritual represents a social and spiritual commitment maintained across generations (Interview with Suhartono, 2024).

The ritual mobilizes broad community involvement. Women prepare ritual foods, fishermen decorate ceremonial boats, and youth assist with logistics. Financed through voluntary community contributions totaling up to 100 million IDR, the event is sustained even during economic downturns through scaled-down observances to maintain its core spiritual value (Antara News, 2025).

Featuring hundreds of decorated fishing vessels, the festival serves as a reunion for returning migrants. The Semarang Municipal Government recognizes *Sedekah Laut* as an intangible cultural heritage asset. Beyond its religious and social dimensions, the ceremony reflects ecological awareness, underscoring the ocean as a vital provider requiring stewardship (RRI, 2023; MetroTV News, 2024; Antara News, 2025).

Rituals begin the day prior with memorial prayers, Qur'anic readings, and spiritual vigils. During the climax, offerings are escorted by a boat procession into open waters following communal blessings. Upon returning, residents participate in *tahlil* and religious discourses reinforcing environmental ethics and community cohesion (Antara

News, 2025; RRI, 2023). *Sedekah Laut* illustrates the integration of indigenous maritime beliefs, Islamic rituals, social solidarity, and ecological consciousness.

8. Banyu Pitu Dadan Segoro



Figure 14: Execution of the Banyu Pitu Ritual (Radar Semarang, 2024, https://radarsemarang.jawapos.com/semarang/724886915/warga-tambakrejo-semarang-gelar-tradisi-ritual-banyu-pitu-dandan-segoro-mohon-doa-baik)

The *Banyu Pitu Dandan Segoro* tradition in Tambakrejo embodies local ecological wisdom connecting upland watersheds with coastal zones. The ritual involves collecting water from seven mountain springs in upper Semarang and releasing it into the sea. According to Rohmadi, a local culture bearer, the practice expresses gratitude while seeking spiritual protection and sustainable livelihoods (Rohmadi cited in Radar Semarang, 2024).

The festival functions as a platform for creative cultural expression. Residents adorn boats, parade agricultural produce, and perform folk arts including *Kuda Lumping* folk dance, youth theater, and traditional music. Intergenerational participation demonstrates the ritual's vitality and adaptability in modern urban contexts (Radar Semarang, 2024).

Banyu Pitu Dandan Segoro carries poignant resonance for Tambakrejo residents who experienced displacement due to sea wall construction and highway infrastructure. The concept of *dandan* ("repair/restoration") reflects the community's desire to heal social cohesion and rebuild their settlement following environmental disruption. Releasing

spring water and agricultural goods symbolizes the deep-seated relationship between coastal inhabitants and the sea (Radar Semarang, 2024).

Ecologically and socially, the tradition highlights community resilience and mutual aid. The symbolism of seven springs reinforces the hydrological connection between upland ecosystem health and coastal survival. Consequently, *Banyu Pitu Dandan Segoro* holds strong potential for formal national intangible cultural heritage designation and serves as a tool for environmental education and community advocacy (Radar Semarang, 2024).

In sum, the cultural heritage assets of the Semarang Port Area demonstrate the interconnectedness of history, economics, religion, ecology, and coastal social life. Sacred sites such as the Sunan Terboyo Mosque and Tomb exemplify spiritual continuity; Semarang Gudang Station, the Syahbandar Tower, Willem III Lighthouse, and the Perusda Building document colonial infrastructure and trade networks; while Kampung Sleko, *Sedekah Laut*, and *Banyu Pitu Dandan Segoro* highlight the adaptation of living cultural traditions.

These assets extend beyond static material artifacts. Their value resides in collective memory, religious practices, mutual aid, maritime traditions, and human-environmental interactions. Facing threats such as tidal flooding, land subsidence, and rapid urban growth, the conservation of Semarang's maritime heritage requires collaborative governance among local residents, municipal authorities, and academic researchers. Heritage sustainability relies not merely on physical preservation, but on the community's capacity to re-signify these assets in contemporary civic life.

DISCUSSION

The preceding empirical analysis demonstrates that the historical significance of Semarang Port cannot be fully captured by evaluating physical monuments or surviving oral traditions in isolation (Westerdahl, 1992). Rather, this historic port should be understood as an integrated maritime cultural system in which physical environments, historical trajectories, and continuous community practices interact to generate cultural meaning (Delf, 2012; Harvey, 2001). This interpretation moves beyond conventional heritage taxonomies by emphasizing the dynamic interplay that keeps the maritime landscape historically meaningful for successive generations (Smith, 2006).

The concept of the Maritime Cultural Landscape, originally formulated by Christer Westerdahl (1992), provides a theoretical framework for understanding maritime

space as the product of long-term human-ocean interaction. In Semarang, this conceptual framework is enhanced by examining the reciprocal relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Rather than viewing these categories as parallel components of a landscape, empirical evidence indicates that they function as interdependent dimensions of a single historical process (Harrison, 2013; Ingold, 2000; Smith, 2006).

This interdependence is evident throughout the historic port district. Built structures maintain spatial continuity by providing material evidence of successive political, economic, and technological transformations (Cosgrove, 1998). Concurrently, rituals, collective memory, localized ecological knowledge, and social practices continuously re-signify these heritage sites within contemporary life (Assmann, 2011). Historical meaning does not reside exclusively within physical monuments or oral traditions; rather, it emerges through ongoing interactions among people, places, and memories (Lowenthal, 1985; Smith, 2006).

This interpretive lens clarifies why many historic port districts maintain cultural vitality despite extensive urban transformations (Delf, 2012). Throughout its history, Semarang has undergone shifts in political regimes, trade systems, coastal morphology, and urban expansion models (Liem, 2004; Nas, 2002). These transformations have not erased its maritime identity; instead, local communities have continually adapted their heritage practices to new historical realities while maintaining meaningful connections with the physical environment.

The endurance of Semarang Port reflects an ongoing process of cultural negotiation rather than static preservation. This perspective challenges approaches that prioritize architectural authenticity while ignoring the cultural practices that sustain historical value (Smith, 2006). Built structures may survive physically yet lose historical relevance if disconnected from community life (Feilden, 2003). Conversely, cultural traditions may weaken when detached from the historic spaces that provide their social context. Effective heritage management must therefore preserve material continuity and cultural continuity as inseparable components of the maritime landscape (UNESCO, 2003; Westerdahl, 1992).

The case of Semarang demonstrates that maritime heritage is best understood as a continuous process rather than a static product (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006). Heritage is not sustained solely through surviving historic buildings or traditional rituals. Instead, it is continually co-created through interactions between heritage environments and the

communities that inhabit, interpret, and utilize them (Harrison, 2013). This process allows historical meanings to evolve without severing ties to the past, keeping the maritime landscape relevant within changing socio-environmental contexts (Ingold, 2000).

The concept of a living maritime cultural landscape offers a comprehensive framework for interpreting historic port cities. "Living" does not merely denote human habitation; it refers to the preservation and active transmission of historical meaning through everyday social practices, religious rituals, cultural traditions, economic activities, and collective memory (Assmann, 2011; Delf, 2012; Ingold, 2000). The landscape remains alive because its historical significance is actively cultivated rather than passively inherited (Smith, 2006).

The implications of this interpretation extend beyond Semarang. Historic port cities across Southeast Asia share similar trajectories marked by long-distance maritime exchange, colonial transformations, multicultural communities, and persistent coastal traditions (Reid, 2011; Sulistiyono, 2003). An integrated approach offers a holistic foundation for historical interpretation and heritage conservation by acknowledging that maritime identity depends on sustaining the reciprocal relationship between people and place (Delf, 2012; Smith, 2006). The analytical framework developed in this study contributes to broader comparative research on maritime heritage, illustrating how tangible and intangible legacies jointly sustain the historical identity of port cities across diverse cultural contexts (Harrison, 2013; Sutherland, 2021).

1. Historical Reconstruction of the Semarang Port Area

The historical evolution of the Semarang Port Area exemplifies a gradual process spanning the emergence of trade networks along Java's Northern Coast (*Pasisir*). Prior to its development into a modern colonial port city, regional maritime activity centered around Bergota. Hydro-geomorphologically, Bergota occupied a strategic position at a river mouth serving as a natural transitional boundary and transport conduit between Java's agrarian interior and the Java Sea (van Bemmelen, 1949; Bird, 1971).

In accordance with Southeast Asian trade models (Hall, 1985; Reid, 1988), Bergota functioned as a primary distribution node for inland agricultural produce and transoceanic trade goods. This interregional exchange established Bergota as an early commercial center (Graaf & Pigeaud, 1985) and laid the spatial and socio-economic foundations for Semarang's growth in subsequent periods.

The transformation of the port accelerated with political and religious shifts under the Demak Sultanate. The establishment of new settlements and administrative structures by Ki Ageng Pandanaran marked Semarang's transition from a local trading node to an administrative center while establishing the port as a frontier for Islamization along Java's northern coastline (Graaf & Pigeaud, 1985; Johns, 1995). During this period, the arrival of Admiral Zheng He's fleet integrated Semarang into the Maritime Silk Road and fostered the growth of a Muslim Chinese community (Suryadinata, 2005; Tan, 2002). As a cultural contact zone (Pratt, 1991), interactions among Javanese, Chinese, Arab, and Malay communities fostered a cosmopolitan coastal culture (*Pasisir*) (Lombard, 1996; Reid, 1993). This dialectic produced an open, adaptive coastal society characterized by cross-cultural synthesis.

A major shift occurred following the ceding of the territory by the Mataram Sultanate to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1678 (Ricklefs, 2008). This event marked a reorientation from an open socio-cultural port to a colonial administrative center integrated into the global capitalist economy (Wallerstein, 1974). Colonial spatial engineering introduced infrastructure such as canals, fortresses, watchtowers, and warehouse complexes reflecting VOC military and commercial control (King, 1990; Niemeijer, 2012). By the 19th century, under the Cultivation System (*Cultuurstelsel*), Semarang Port evolved into a primary agro-export gateway shipping sugar, coffee, and tobacco to European markets (Elson, 1997; Knight, 2014). Rapid commercialization prompted immigration, bringing together diverse social classes and cultural backgrounds within the port zone (Lombard, 1996).

From a Maritime Cultural Landscape perspective, these historical trajectories demonstrate that the port cannot be understood solely as economic infrastructure. Seafaring, trade, migration, and intercultural contact continuously shaped a dynamic cultural landscape. The port's history represents an ongoing process of spatial and cultural production rather than a sequence of economic or political events.

2. Maritime Cultural Landscape and Coastal Community Identity

Findings indicate that the community's relationship with the port extends beyond economic functions to form social and cultural ties that shape coastal identity (Supriyanto & Setyowati, 2019). Centuries of trade fostered a multi-ethnic community coexisting through commerce, intermarriage, and knowledge exchange (Willmott, 1960; Steenbrink,

1993). This interaction generated forms of cultural acculturation that remain observable in contemporary Semarang (Lombard, 1996).

Interview data confirm that the port remains a vital livelihood source. Most local residents are employed as fishermen, dockworkers, stevedores, or informal service providers tied directly to port activities. This continuity underscores the functional endurance of the area from the colonial period to the present. The port serves not only as a distribution node but also as a site for the social reproduction of coastal life.

Anthropologically, this dynamic highlights how coastal identity develops through adaptation to maritime environments (Acheson, 1981; Kusnadi, 2009). Human-ocean interactions foster values of solidarity, openness, and mutual aid reflected in daily practices (Firth, 1966). Economic reliance on marine conditions encourages cooperative practices in fishing operations and community events (Satria, 2015).

The port thus generates a value system that forms an integral component of coastal culture. These empirical findings reinforce the Maritime Cultural Landscape framework by placing human agency at the center of landscape formation. The value of the heritage site is defined not only by physical monuments but also by ongoing social practices, positioning the local community as the primary custodian of maritime landscape sustainability.

3. Integration of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Heritage documentation indicates that the Semarang Port Area possesses diverse cultural assets. Tangible heritage includes port facilities, the lighthouse, the harbor master tower, historic residential quarters, and religious sites established throughout the port's history (Brommer et al., 1995; Balai Pelestarian Kebudayaan X, 2020). Concurrently, local communities maintain intangible cultural traditions such as *Sedekah Laut Tambaklorok*, the Sunan Terboyo *Haul*, and the *Banyu Pitu Dandan Segoro* ritual as expressions of coastal cultural identity (Semarang City Culture and Tourism Office, 2021; Supriyanto & Setyowati, 2019; Smith, 2006).

The findings demonstrate that tangible and intangible heritage dimensions are mutually dependent. Built structures derive cultural meaning from ongoing social practices, while living traditions gain historical legitimacy from the historic spaces in which they occur. This relationship indicates that heritage conservation cannot rely solely on architectural preservation; it must also support the continuity of cultural practices.

These findings align with Laurajane Smith's conceptualization of heritage as a cultural process (Smith, 2006). The historical significance of an area resides in the ongoing relationship between communities and their inherited spatial contexts (Harvey, 2001). Conservation strategies must therefore address material and socio-cultural dimensions simultaneously (Poulios, 2014).

4. Implications for Historic Area Conservation

The study indicates that conserving the Semarang Port Area requires a comprehensive strategy beyond physical restoration (Supriyanto & Setyowati, 2019). Environmental pressures (including tidal flooding, land subsidence, urban expansion, and land-use shifts) demonstrate that long-term sustainability depends on the community's capacity to maintain the cultural practices that define the area's identity (Poulios, 2014).

Conservation frameworks should integrate the protection of tangible heritage with the safeguarding of intangible traditions through participatory governance involving local residents, municipal authorities, academic institutions, and civic stakeholders. This approach aligns with the Living Maritime Heritage model, which views historic port districts as dynamic cultural spaces sustained through continuous interactions among society, environment, and history.

This study proposes designating the Semarang Port Area not merely as an isolated historic monument, but as a holistic Maritime Cultural Landscape possessing simultaneous historical, social, economic, and cultural functions. Under this framework, conservation efforts shift from static object protection toward sustaining the enduring relationship between coastal communities and the cultural spaces that define Semarang's maritime identity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Semarang Port Area constitutes a living maritime cultural landscape shaped through historical interactions among seafaring, trade, settlement development, and coastal social dynamics. The significance of the area resides not only in tangible heritage assets such as historic buildings, structures, and sacred sites, but also in intangible cultural heritage comprising traditions, rituals, social practices, and collective memories maintained by local communities. Coastal identity is thus formed through the reciprocal relationship between physical maritime space and ongoing socio-cultural life.

This research contributes to maritime history and cultural anthropology by applying a maritime cultural landscape framework to analyze an historic port district as an integrated cultural system. The findings emphasize that conserving historic port areas requires moving beyond physical restoration toward safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through community participation and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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