

EDITORIAL

Within the last twenty years, a community that shares the interest and passion for the vernacular settlements, their past, present and future have come to be. Now known as the ISVS, the community is researching the inherited built environment and heritage left by the ancestors and its future continuity. In this issue, some of them are presenting articles that deal with the vernacular settlements from different regions of the world. Even though they have different approaches to research, the focus, the interests and concerns are almost the same.

Ferenz Zamoly in his article of the vernacular architecture of the Tetum people in Indonesia explores several dwellings built in the regions of the Tetum people. He offers an in-depth analysis of the architectural and construction elements, building techniques and their artistic expressions resulting from the various geographical and climate conditions. In comparing them to a single example of a house—even though built in the Tetum region—it shows the alien influences in the treatment of its construction, as well as its interior elements; influences brought from the island of Bali. His major concern about the future of the Tetum vernacular dwellings is the transformation these dwellings will go through due to the introduction of contemporary materials. Hence, he raises the question “where is the vernacular?” The arrival of new materials has made a significant impact on the Tetum vernacular building techniques in such a way that they are slowly reaching extinction. The vernacular styles are being left behind and abandoned for modern uniformity.

Katerina Ritzouli on the other hand, presents a very interesting article from from the island of Santorini. She focuses on the architectural building materials specific to the Santorini island; the new technique of building in volcanic materials and the “theran eart” a pozzolanic natural cement, that directly influenced the vernacular and monumental building realizations. She follows the building program and techniques through three different periods of Santorinis’ past. It was, first under Venetian rule for more than three hundred years starting from the beginning of the 13th century. After this, the Ottomans arrive in 1536, bringing the architecture on the island and at the end the era of the Greek Republic, from the third half of the 18th century until the ’50s of the 20th century, where other changes occurred in the architecture of the island.

The island’s strange and rare natural wealth was a source of the raw material in every construction, therefore providing this specific architectural building program, converting the hostile volcanic earth into a model of harmonizing the environment with the constructed space. She studies and compares each architectural constructive element through the different periods of the islands history in order to document possible evolution on each structural element as well as on the evolution of the islands structural systems. She shows her concerns about the import of the cement and concrete on the island as a direct threat to the inherited heritage of the island.

Iordanes Sinamides deals with the transformation of the vernacular related to the development of the tobacco industry and livestock farming in the Pomak settlements in Xanthi region of Greece. He introduces the Pomak people who live in the settlements in close vicinity to the Greek-Bulgarian border in the Rodopi mountains. He introduces the physiognomy of the settlements, the physical layout and their spatial development as well as the development of the tissue within the settlements, the neighborhoods and the circulation within them. Moreover, he introduces the urban element of “diavatiko”, a small potico like, narrow passage under the first floors of the houses at the level of the streets, creating tunnel like passages within the core of the settlements. His typological analysis of the dwellings’ floor plans sourced from the primal use of the dwellings and the spatial arrangement related to the topography, the domestic life as well as the tobacco are elaborate and exemplary. Like the other two authors, he shares the same issues brought by modernization as well as the decline of the tobacco industry in Greece, when the majority of young Pomaks, due to lack of work moved to the nearby city of Xanthi. The Pomaks’ settlements slowly became either completely abandoned or where we still have inhabitants present in the settlements, rapidly transformed due to the tendency of urbanization and adoption of new habitation standards combined with the indifference of the state to protect the memory and the identity of the place and the continuity of the vernacular traditions. Indeed, they affected the loss of the vernacular built heritage.

In all, the common “villain” in today’s vernacular traditions and heritage is the new contemporary material. The concrete, the cement and the technology that slowly influenced the future of the old craftsmanship traditions, old built technologies, and traditions induced the risk of their complete extinction.

The one written by Yulia Nurliani Lukito, who takes a diametrically opposite view of modernity, contrasts these papers. Colonization of Indonesia brought modernity there and transformed it since 19th century by which it has now become what it is now. The Dutch Engineers, although initially ruthless and unaccommodating, eventually adopted and promoted locality and supported the progress of settlements connected with water. Julia argues that Colonialism despite its adverse impacts did have significant contribution to the Vernacular settlements, which she articulates in this paper. Tradition, modernity and vernacular settlements are invariably linked and the transactions are complex and multi-faceted. The papers in this issue deal with these complexities in a multitude of ways and helps us understand and advance knowledge on vernacular settlements, the past, the present and the future.

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