

# ISVS 5- Colombo: Report

The 5<sup>th</sup> International Seminar on Vernacular Settlements was held at Mount Lavinia Hotel in Colombo hosted by the University of Moratuwa from 30<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> 2010, on the theme, “Vernacular Futures: Reconstruction, Resettlement and Reproduction of Tradition”. ISVS-5 received an overwhelming response from academics and researchers interested in the Vernacular settlements and received a large number of abstracts and proposals for paper presentations. Subsequent to a tedious process of refereeing and development to full papers, ISVS-5 had 40 speakers from countries from Australia to Europe presenting their papers.

The two days of intense speaker presentations were spearheaded by two of the most prolific academics who have espoused on vernacular settlements delivering their key-note addresses.



Prof. Paul Oliver, the emeritus professor of Architecture at the Oxford Brooks University delivered one of the most enlightening key-note speeches with a presentation of breathtaking images of vernacular settlements across the world. As to be expected, he demonstrated yet again the richness of the traditions and people’s ingenuities in transforming the natural, demanding and challenging terrains and habitations of the world to some of the most enchanting habitats through the engagement of the vernacular process.



Dr. Peter Kellet approached the entire issue of vernacular settlement from a new and challenging perspective. Drawing upon the analysis of the characteristics of vernacular settlements Prof. Amos Rapoport had suggested, Dr Peter Kellett convincingly argued for the recognition, and appreciation of the contemporary informal settlements as the continuation of the vernacular in the contemporary contexts. He challenged the researchers and academics to re-view the informal settlements as equally enchanting manifestations of tradition which have often been discarded as

being banal and insignificant. This refreshing perspective of the contemporary settlements undeniably provided the way forward in thinking about and understanding one direction in which the futures of the vernacular settlements may lie; indeed a fitting conceptual buttress to the theme of the conference: vernacular futures.



The conference at Colombo kept to the theme of very well by rejuvenating the traditions of Sri Lanka, when its opening ceremony was orchestrated with drummers and dancers to the ceremonial tunes of the *Kandyan* dancers while a traditional oil lamping ceremony took place to which all dignitaries were invited to contribute. The traditional lighting of the oil lamp signifies invitations of blessings from Buddha while hinting at the enlightenment of the participants that is expected through the discourses to follow.

One of most notable aspects of the ISVS-5 was the attendance of a large contingent of non-paper presenters, particularly from Thailand. The teachers and students who attended from Thailand, not necessarily to present papers but just to participate and gain insights from the other speakers was an undeniable assertion that ISVS has become recognized as a significant event in the calendar of architectural events. The current interest of both Manila and Egypt to host the ISVS-6 in 2012 is indeed yet another indication that the momentum is building up into which Colombo has provided a fitting thrust.



Colombo's arrangement of the venue for the seminar was exceptional at the *Mount Lavinia* Hotel which overlooked Colombo's most popular beach and had an ambience of the historical traditions in the Colonial architecture of the hotel itself. The atmosphere was a bit more formal than what prevails at ISVS seminars but the evening party in the *Mount Lavinia* beach in a decorated *Cadgan* hut and the pre and post conference tours to the ancient cities of *Anuradhapura* and the breath taking *Sigiriya* Rock fortress were unforgettable experiences of the participants. Behind the formal meeting that took place at the conference venue; in the corridors, in the coaches to the ancient cities, at the beach and the other places to which the attendees of the conference had made adventurous trips, the numerous conversations that took place on the vernacular among other things indeed kept the traditions of the ISVS alive and well.