

Theoretical Inspirations of Amos Rapoport: Reflections on the International Studies on Vernacular Settlements (ISVS)

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Introduction

As known, one of the most significant books Amos Rapoport wrote as far back as 1969 is titled *House Form and Culture*. Most readers would have come across this groundbreaking book. Emanating from research and insights, *House Form and Culture* ties together ideas from anthropology and architecture. The book established two things: First, built forms come into being determined by certain factors and are modified by other factors. Second, in terms of houses, culture is the main determinant of form, while other forces such as climate, materials, and technologies modify them. Over the years, this revelation has had a profound impact on academic investigations into settlements across the world. While it is hard to evaluate this impact conclusively, there is no doubt that many intellectual minds have been stimulated. Although property developers and governments have still not understood, houses continue to derive their meaningfulness primarily from this relationship. Indeed, it is more so in the vernacular settlements, which provide the dwellings for the majority of the people even in the modern world.

Thus, the academics examining the built environments often come across these issues. Many have examined the nuances of houses across the world, culminating in confluences and narratives. For example, Paul Oliver wrote *Shelter and Society* (1969) and *Dwellings: The House Across the World* (1987), which articulate them. Susan Denyer wrote *African Traditional Architecture* (1978), and, Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt wrote *Chinese Traditional Architecture* (1984). Ronald Lewcock, Barbara Sansoni and Laki Senanayake wrote *Architecture of an Island* (1998), showing the traditional architecture in Sri Lanka. These demonstrate how Rapoport's ideas have had a profound impact on the vernacular studies of many geographical contexts. Indeed, Paul Oliver compiled the *Encyclopedia of the Vernacular Architecture of the World*, (1997) providing insights into the house forms across the world.

In 1999, in an apt location from where such house forms could be witnessed in abundance, University of Indonesia launched 'the International Seminar on Vernacular Settlements' (ISVS). Inspired by the book *House Form and Culture*, and awed by the variety of houses that exist among the tribal communities in Indonesia, the seminar explored the multi-faceted manifestations of vernacular practices in Asian settlements, bringing together scholars examining the relationships between built forms and culture. An international Society for the Study of Vernacular Settlements came into being which publishes a monthly journal titled ISVS e-Journal that is Scopus indexed since 2015.

This chapter focuses on how the contributors to the ISVS seminar and the ISVS e-Journal have been inspired by the writings of Amos Rapoport. It is based on the premise that his theoretical legacy has reached academics across geographical boundaries in numerous social, cultural, and political contexts. Its aim is to show evidence to substantiate this claim.

The chapter employs two inquiries. First, it examines the last two seminars: ISVS 10 and 11. Second, it examines papers published in the ISVS e-Journal, based on content analysis of papers that refer to Rapoport. There are no previous studies examining the thematic alignments of either the ISVS seminars or the ISVS e-Journal and the writings of Rapoport. All the seminars have proceedings published in print form, until 2021. The ISVS-10 has the proceedings accessible through the website. ISVS e-Journal is accessible at the website: <https://isvshome.com/e-journal.html>

ISVS Seminars and the Inspirations from Amos Rapoport

Eleven ISVS seminars have been held since 1999 and continues. In every seminar, there have been a number of papers referring to Rapoport's writings. Following table shows the places and the themes of these seminars and how they relate to his theoretical ideas.

Table 01: ISVS Seminars and Theoretical Ideas of Amos Rapoport
(Source: Ranjith Dayaratne)

Seminar / Location	Theme	Ideas from <i>House Form and Culture</i>	Ideas from other writings of Rapoport
ISVS 1 1999 University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia.	The Role of Local Knowledge in the Built Environment	Vernacular settlements have local knowledge upon which they are constructed. Such knowledge is capable of resisting the onslaught of modernization and globalization on vernacular settlements.	Rapoport (1983) points out that the design of built environments must derive their appropriateness only in relation to their cultural context.
ISVS 2 2002 University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia.	Vernacular Settlements in the New Millennium: Resistance and Resilience of Local Knowledge in the Built Environment	This seminar reinforced the ideas of the ISVS 1.	
ISVS 3 2006 Catholic University of Parahyangan in Bandung and The Christian University of Petra in Surabaya, Indonesia.	Rethinking local knowledge in vernacular settlements	This seminar also reinforced the ideas of the ISVS 1 & 2.	
ISVS 4 2008 CEPT university, Ahmadabad, India	Vernacular Settlements and Architecture in Transition pace or speed'	Vernacular settlements constantly undergo transformations arising from the internal processes as well as external influences. The transition is generally slow and allows adaptation, but could sometimes be arbitrary and abrupt. In the latter, the consequences are negative and are detrimental to the wellbeing of the people.	Rapoport (1983) suggests a model to investigate such transitions. He proposes to look at culture being comprised of a 'core' and a 'periphery'. He points out that the core remains intact and is slow to change while the periphery adapts to the changes and protects the core.
ISVS 5 2010 University of Moratuwa, Colombo, Sri Lanka.	Vernacular Futures: Reconstruction, Resettlement, and Reproduction of Tradition	The role culture and tradition play in the settlements is significant. This idea was investigated in the case of 'new vernacular' settlements of the refugees.	Rapoport (1988) points out that informal settlements in cities are vernacular settlements.
ISVS 6 2012 Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus.	Contemporary Vernaculars: Places, Processes, and Manifestations.	Vernacular exists today. Traditions have not ended. Contemporary places and processes manifest them differently. Rapoport (1988) has suggested the idea that vernacular is beyond the traditional settlements.	
ISVS 7 2014 Istanbul Technical University, Turkey.	Reassessing Vernacular Architecture Theory and Practice: Traditions, Identities, and Globalization.	Re-examined Rapoport's (1969) key ideas in the context of globalization.	Rapoport (1983) shows how globalization and other forces impact house forms. He also shows how to bring about meaningful design interventions.

ISVS 8 2016 University of Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia.	Conversations with Sea: People, Places, and the Ideas of Maritime Settlements.	Re-examined Rapoport's (1969) key ideas in the context of maritime settlements.	Re-focused the attention to the relationships the vernacular settlements had with water, people, places, and maritime settlements. Unraveled unique water-based culture.
ISVS 9 2018 Udayana University, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia.	Reframing the Vernacular: Politics, Semiotics, and Representation.	Focused on how people who inhabit the vernacular settlements articulate and express the attitudes, values, and beliefs through built forms, employing semiotics, authority and power.	Built upon the premise that culture is at the heart of politics, as well as the representations articulated through signs and symbols, as Rapoport (1990) shows.
ISVS 10 2020 School of Architecture and Planning, Bhopal, India.	Re-domestication of the World through vernacular after the Covid-19 Pandemic: Origins and Manifestations of Domesticity in Vernacular Architecture.	Re-visited Rapoport's (1969) key ideas in the context of abrupt culture change emanating from the Covid - 19 Pandemic.	Focused on our departure from homes to wander around the cities, and therefore called for a re-domestication of the World through vernacular after the Covid-19.
ISVS 11 2022 SEDA, Navrachana University, Vadodara, India.	Potency of the Vernacular Processes and Settlements	Rapoport shows that the potency of the vernacular settlements lies in the fact that they are culturally rich and wholesome.	

Analysis of papers presented at ISVS Seminars: ISVS 10 and 11

At the ISVS-10 seminar, Waghmare and Singhal (2020) examining inclusive planning techniques for the sustainable revitalisation of vernacular settlements in India, brings out three significant aspects for the planning of vernacular settlements. They are: (1) inclusive planning adopting a multi-dimensional lens for the revitalisation of them, (2) use of an 'Inclusive Cities Decision Matrix' as a flexible planning tool, (3) shift of the governance style from a top-down approach to an inclusive and transformative approach. These are derived from Rapoport (1977). Vora and Gajjar (2020) examine the relationship between house form and the Nagar community in Patan, India. They show that the traditional Nagar houses have evolved according to the social conditions, cultural practices, and ritual performances that offer better social interaction, further articulating the ideas of Rapoport (1969). Vinod and Kini (2020) examine the meaning of vernacular architecture in Mattur Village, India. They assess the ethos of spaces by analyzing the transformations that have taken place over time to understand culture, belief systems, day-to-day activities, occupation, and the economic and social structure there. They refer to Rapoport (1980;1990c;1998; 2001, and 2005) which articulate the relations between house forms and culture.

At the ISVS-11, Mirkar and Qamar (2022) examining the role of building materials in the expressions of contemporary vernacular architecture refer to the construction techniques and evolution of vernacular architecture influenced by the availability of materials (Rapoport, 1969). They elaborate on how the 'economics of materials' becomes an important criterion for their selection as well as architectural expression (Rapoport, 1969). Shankar (2022) examining the continuity of cultural ideas in the dwellings of Udaipur, India shows how an environment is created through a series of relationships between surrounding objects and people. They are also affected by the relationships of individuals with each other. To do so, she employs Rapoport's idea (1969) that dwelling types become distinct with the articulation of culture. Jalan (2022) re-interprets the rules of vernacular practices for contemporary built forms within an urban setting and refers to Rapoport (1991) extensively. The paper produces a framework to examine the adaptations of dwellings due to transformations and how communities prioritize the changes. It investigates the vernacular practices shaping built and unbuilt spaces within varying contexts. Rapoport (1991) shows that the physical setting provides the possibilities among which choices are made through the taboos, customs, and traditional ways

of culture. Jalan elaborates on the idea of variations and adaptations which are personal, based on individual needs than generalizing them as typological changes in a dwelling type (Rapoport,1991). The paper also examines the role of materials and construction technology as modifying factors influencing the overall form and spatial characteristics. Rapoport (1991) has discussed the importance of enclosure to create any type of place; Jalan (2022) uses this idea with reference to the hierarchical order of enclosures to achieve temporal shelters.

Same analysis can be extended to the previous seminars from ISVS-1 to ISVS-9 too. However, there is no space in this chapter to do so. Moreover, there is no need for it too. The examples above amply demonstrate how the contributors to the ISVS seminars have been inspired by the writings of Rapoport.

ISVS e-Journal and the inspirations from Rapoport

ISVS e-Journal has been published since 2013. Many have published academic papers examining the nuances of culture and their manifestations in the built forms.

In its Volume 3.2, Nuraini, et.al (2014) examine Bincar-Bonom, as the basis of spatial arrangements of Singengu Village, Indonesia and uses the idea of 'spatial' as interdependence between three processes: (1) the process of activity occurring in an area according to the functional relationship, (2) the process of providing physical facilities that answer the need for space for activities such as form of work place, shelter, transportation and communication, and (3) the process of providing and merging of various parts of the spatial plan as an integrated area (Rapoport,1969). Brisibe (2014) examines the Ijo fishing settlements in Nigeria and refers to the theoretical approach of the cultural use of space through activities (Rapoport,1990b).

In Volume 4.1, Fugate (2015) presents a case of creating an Islamic place, by means of building conversion and sacred space. Referring to the mosques in America, he employs the definition of vernacular to argue that they are considered sacred vernacular spaces (Rapoport, 1995a,1976) because they are a "direct physical embodiment of a way of worship and of a community" (Rapoport, 1995a: 32). Ballinger and Wilke (2015) redefine the Ahwahnee Principles examining the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro. They refer to Rapoport (1976) to argue that informal settlements are vernacular settlements. They say that the construction method of faveas is also efficient in the use of resources (Rapoport,1988), and point out that Rapoport calls a design construction practice 'open-endedness in design', that allows additive, subtractive, and other changes (Rapoport 1988, 1995b), which is what happens at the favelas. Referring to how the difficulties of living in unplanned settlements outweigh the difficulties created by forced evictions in the name of sustainability (Rapoport, 1990a), they show that the characteristics of vernacular architecture such as the models, adaptation, and heuristics (Rapoport, 1990a) stand out as particularly applicable to Rio's favelas. The paper shows that vernacular settlements develop unique responses to their landscapes (Rapoport 1988) and argues that favela buildings "can change to accommodate changes in life cycle, lifestyle, income, acculturation, and the like" (Rapoport, 1988:70). They show that models are the "implicit/unwritten design" standards that are shared among the vernacular people (Rapoport, 1988, 56), and that the constraints of spontaneous settlements force the builders into "elimination of alternatives" and to find some "congruence with some ideal so as to maximize a set of ranked values" (Rapoport, 1990a: 22). The paper refers to the idea of the extent of sharing of the underlying model or the "schemata" (Rapoport, 1988: 56), and to the flexibility and resourcefulness of space which means favela architecture has a "degree of multisensory qualities of environment" and "relative importance of semi-fixed features as opposed to fixed-features" (Rapoport,1988: 71). They conclude that these demonstrate, as Rapoport (1988: 56) has said, "the degree of congruence and the nature of the relation between environment and culture". The paper also uses Rapoport's Digital Image Archive on Vernacular Design, Flickr Gallery, photograph taken on November 12, 2010 with permission. In this Volume, Tovivich (2015) also examines conserving vernacular architecture through action planning at the Klong Bangluang Development, Thailand in which she refers to Rapoport (1969) as a pioneer of the studies of vernacular architecture.

In Volume 4.2, Khalaf (2015) examines the parallel evolution and shared challenges of urban heritage and vernacular studies and refers to 'design quality' of informal settlements and how they respond to the needs of their inhabitants (Rapoport, 1988).

In Volume 6.1, Kartika Sari et al. (2019) examine the meaning of home in terms of privacy, modesty, and hospitality in the traditional Malay house, West Borneo, Indonesia. They show that an individual's arrangements and sense of interior space within a home are affected by several factors such as religion and culture (Rapoport, 2005). They also show that privacy needs, the use of space, and how privacy was regulated is one of the outstanding ways in which cultures differ, resulting in different house forms around the world (Rapoport, 1969).

In Vol. 6.2, Tobing and Hutabara (2019) examine the traditional settlement architecture of the Batakese Toba Tribe and clan Kinship in the Village of Hutaginjang, North Sumatra, Indonesia. They refer to the idea of relations in architecture and say that the function is very closely related to the building, namely the attainment of physical containing rules, philosophical, and the moral values held by the local community (Rapoport, 1969).

In Vol. 6.4, Dayaratne (2019) examines the human settlements created in response to the sea by looking at the shifting relations in Barastis, fishing huts and the ocean villas of Bahrain. He refers to Rapoport (1990c) to support the argument of gaining insights and deriving the associational meanings that can be discerned from built responses as recorded in the material and non-material communications. Gulati et.al (2019) examine the architectural spaces as socio-cultural connectors, through the vernacular houses of Lucknow, India. They point out that these houses offer group solutions characteristic of prevailing climate, distinct materials and site-conditions, manifestations of a "complex interaction of potentialities of available materials, cultural skills, climate and economic levels of a place, attained, through a system of trial and error" over time according to Rappaport (1969;17). Artiningram et al. (2019) look at the adaptation patterns of Bugis diaspora village architecture in the Sulawesi Island in Indonesia through Sulapa Eppa' philosophy and function-form-meaning-context theory. They show adaptation patterns of Bugis village architecture in their new environment as a sustaining technique because vernacular architecture is shaped not only by function and physical environments but also by social and cultural factors (Rapoport, 1969).

In Vol. 7.1, Kurniawan (2020) examines the spatial changes in the Korowai traditional settlements in Indonesia. He argues that architecture is present because of human needs and refers to it as Rapoport defines, "...the folk tradition, on the other hand, as the direct and unself-conscious translation into physical form of a culture, its needs and values, as well as the desires, dreams, and passions of a people" (Rapoport 1969:7).

In Vol. 7.2, Dayaratne writing on architecture of poetic terrains in the artificial islands of Bahrain refers to Rapoport (1969) when he says, that "the geography of architecture must not be confined to the built-forms; rather encompass both the material and non-material existences that give rise to that form—in the words of Rapoport, culture, materials, climate, and technology".

In Vol. 7.3, Faisal and Wihardyanto (2020) look at the Negotiations of vernacular shapes and materials of Talang Mamak Tribal Houses, East Sumatra, Indonesia. They refer to Rapoport (1969) who points out that vernacular architecture is developed by the local people with traditional approaches, utilizing the building potentials in the local areas: materials, technologies, and knowledge.

In Vol. 7.4, Solikhah and Fatimah (2020) present the lessons learned from vernacular architecture to achieve sustainable human settlements by examining the Praigoli Village, West Sumba, Indonesia. They refer to Rapoport (1982) who says that the built environment conceives meanings that represent the dignities chosen, determined, and owned by the society that cannot be separated from Nature since they are relevant. In this issue, Jagatramka, Kumar and Pipralia (2020) also propose sustainability indicators for vernacular architecture in India derived from Rapoport (1969).

In Vol. 8.1, Jagatramka, Kumar and Pipralia (2021) examine the problems and prospects of the transformations of vernacular architecture of India. They argue that the changes are best studied through

houses, as they are the direct expressions of changing values, perceptions, and ways of living (Rapoport, 1969).

In Vol. 8.2, Bharadwaj and Kumari (2021) examine the spatio-temporal efficacy of historic street forms in preserving domesticity of vernacular settlements in Ulsoor, Bangalore, India. They refer to Rapoport (1969) who has observed how deeply the character of vernacular settlement design is intertwined with its socio-cultural traditions and practices, without striving for the aesthetic and stylistic interests. They argue that religious belief systems affect space making, and the orientation and form of the vernacular house in contrast to developing countries where spaces neither communicate nor practice cosmological beliefs (Rapoport, 1969). They also show that Rapoport (1990) discusses the idea of high, middle, and low-level meanings, and illustrates the relationships between human behaviour and the built environment, interpreting the high-level meaning as cosmological and cultural belief, middle-level as a concept of identity with socio-economic conditions, and low-level with behavioural changes within space. Rapoport (1990) argues that high-level and middle-level meanings are contingent to socio-cultural parameters. Nuraeny et al. (2021) examine kitchen as the heart of Indonesian houses. While introducing vernacular architecture and domestic space, they refer to Rapoport (1969) who said that settlements are made to adapt to climate by using natural resources, which were passed down in a community to survive. They also refer to Rapoport (1969) to understand that culture plays a critical role in forming architecture. Rudwiarti, et al. (2021) examine the oral traditions in conserving vernacular houses in the Brayut tourist village in Yogyakarta, Indonesia and how to inspire user motivation. They refer to Rapoport (1977,1990) who identified that in the physical environment, there is a perceptual place about which people are conscious and to which they give symbolic meanings. They cite Rapoport (1982) who indicated the relationship between people's worldview and house building. They argue that Brayut Village relates to what Rapoport (1977) said about the concept of a house as a home as a place where the family exists and represents its social status. Priyomarsono (2021) examines the influences of culture on the development of the Juwana Sub-district of Pati, Central Java, Indonesia, and shows that, according to Rapoport (1969), life experience can affect the perspective of an architect's work and the cultural and social dynamics of that society. He argues that this enables settlement shapes to become the embodiment of civilization, development, or changes of society. He further argues that this view of Rapoport can be seen in the Juwana settlement. Benkari and Jamali (2021) present the research trends in vernacular architecture through a bibliometric study. They point out that Rapoport (1969) distinguishes between "vernacular architecture" as being what people build by themselves, while "traditional architecture" being what is built for the people with the help of a "master builder" (Rapoport, 1969). They also say that Rapoport (1969) showed that in similar geographic and climatic contexts, different groups would adopt different solutions in their architecture. They assert that, in the adoption of a certain form or composition in vernacular dwellings, it is the socio-cultural requirements that supersede the climatic or other conditions of the geographic context (Rapoport, 1969). They listed Rapoport as a significant contributor among the several authors who have contributed to vernacular architecture research. They point out that vernacular studies are increasingly globalized and evolving, with its methodologies following more transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, as Rapoport (2008) had called for.

In Vol. 8.3, Deshpande (2021) examines the role of customs and practices during the epidemics by revisiting the homes in Nagpur, India. He says that, according to Rapoport (1969), the socio-cultural attributes manifest in the daily lives of people. Daily routine, the way guests are received, patterns of cooking and eating, and rituals provide clues to understand specific cultural contexts. He argues that, according to Rapoport (2008), analyses of everyday domestic activities provide insights into the latent functions which vary from culture to culture. Lukito and Nugroho (2021) present the practices of fabricating culture through spatial practices by looking at the Rampak Genteng festival in the former Jatiwangi sugar factory in West Java, Indonesia. They point out that Rapoport (1982) categorizes physical elements of public spaces based on the flexibility of each element corresponding to changing forces and this categorization can be used to understand the spatial changes in public spaces and social interactions there. They refer to Rapoport's idea of spatial elements consisting of some features that include people. Fixed-feature elements change slowly and are also

under the control of regulations. Users are in the control semi-fixed feature elements used to communicate meanings. Non-fixed feature elements relate to human activities that change easily.

In Vol. 8.4, Muchamad, et.al (2021) examine the Batang Concepts of floating settlements in the Barito Basin in Indonesia. They point out that culture and natural factors have a significant impact on the creation of the settlement's spatial organization as Rapoport (1969) has indicated.

This analysis can be extended further to the volumes 9 and 10 as well as the forthcoming issue. The Volume 10 being a monthly publication, there is a large number of papers the analysis of which cannot be included here with the limitations of this chapter. Nevertheless, the above analysis provide ample evidence to substantiate the claim made at the beginning of this chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that the contributions to the ISVS seminars and the ISVS e-Journal have illuminated the meanings people ascribe to their living spaces and settlements and how they are fashioned by beliefs as much as climate, technologies, and the politics. The studies that have examined the geo-physical contexts, tribal ideologies, religious beliefs, cultural variations, material manifestations, and symbolic representations of the vernacular settlements have been surveyed to identify how they have been inspired by, derived support from, and have constructed upon the thesis of Amos Rapoport that house forms and cultures are intricately intertwined. This analysis clearly demonstrates that Amos Rapoport has remained a never diminishing inspiration driving most of the intellectual energies of the participants of ISVS seminars and the ISVS e-journal and continues to do so.

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