

# EDITORIAL

The year 2024 will be a critical year for the ISVS: both the seminar and the ISVS e-journal. Anyone who followed the ISVS e-journal over the past few years would have noticed that since 2022, the journal has been on a steadfast rise in terms of the number of papers published which reached a peak in the month of December 2023. In fact, in 2023, it began to be published as a monthly journal, although moving from 6 issues per year to 12 issues per year appeared to be excessive.

However, this came into being so, as a result of a number of happenings. First, the ISVS seminar, to which the ISVS e-journal is an accompaniment, changed its frequency in 2020. Since 1999, it has been happening once every two years but since 2020, it has been taking place every year. Understandably, that increased the participants to the seminars and also produced more research. Inevitably, they were submitted to the ISVS e-journal, which by that time had established itself as a steadfast, reliable and qualitatively high journal of repute.

ISVS was also taking a theoretically more challenging and articulated position with regard to vernacular. Since the keynote speech of Peter Kellett in Colombo, ISVS has been shifting away from promoting vernacular as a 'thing of the past' and 'those happenings in rural and tribal settlements' to a broader definition to accommodate what Peter Kellett called 'contemporary vernacular'. As he convincingly demonstrated, vernacular exists everywhere, including the modern world and even in cities. It is rather naïve to think of vernacular only as the thatch cottages and primitive huts and their associated ceremonies and traditions. As Nessar Al Sayed has pointed out, traditions are not dead and gone. Today, there are new traditions such as 'vernacular photography' as one author from Jordon recently argued. In this sense, taking 'selfies' is a vernacular tradition of the modern world, although it involves sophisticated digital gadgets. For many, this interpretation may appear to be problematic since there are ingrained perceptions about vernacular in many minds, that link it to the primitive huts: mud, thatch and the like. These are difficult perceptions to be challenged.

In this issue, the papers numerously examine the built-environmental issues in India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Kazakhstan and Thailand among others. In fact, there are new and interesting developments too. Now, the authors come not only from the field of architecture, but also from other associated fields such as fine arts and social studies. Nevertheless, they all deal with the social and cultural aspects of the built-environments and demonstrate that the issues of our surroundings are complex and need to be examined through multiple lenses.

Issues are numerous and range from the vernacular as well as the issues of heritage conservation. In more specific terms, the papers in this issue have focused on the following.

Mohamed Khater, Nagwa Zouair & Mohamed Faik examine the barriers and solutions for developing Egyptian handicrafts and offer insights from the Middle Egypt. In contrast, Denny Indrayana Setyadi et al. examine the role of vernacular and culture in place branding. They generate insights from a literature survey. Shubuha Pilar Naredia et al. examine the cultural reproduction of Merti Kali Code in vernacular art in Brontokusuman, in the Yogyakarta city in Indonesia. Ignacio Juan Ferruses, Sergio Artola Dols, and Clara Cantó Gago examine the planned productions of vernacularized dwellings and settings in India. They look particularly at a settlement in Baroda designed by Balkrishna Doshi.

On the other hand, Srisofian et al. are working towards communicating environmental preservation through vernacular discourse in the Toba Lake Area in Indonesia. In a similar vein, Nofrizaldi et al. unravel the artistic language of Handiwirman inspired from the ordinary things. Zhumagulov et al. adds to this with a thorough investigation into the development of trade in the early 18th and 20th centuries in the Atyrau Region of Kazakhstan and its impact on local communities.

Faisal Yousef Sabah examines a very different issue, not directly related to vernacular but indeed is part of it. He examines the affordability of housing in the city of Jenin in Palestine, and brings out the insights from the residents, whose views are vernacular sentiments. Arif Budi Sholihah however is more forthright. He investigates the nature of vernacular architecture of Java and specifically looks at the issues of production and reproduction of space.

Syukur Kholil, Sulidar & Maulana Andinata Dalimunthe look at a usually overlooked aspect of vernacular settlements: the politics. They examine the vernacular politics and the role of Ulama in the 2020 simultaneous local elections in Indonesia. Kezia Clarissa Langi, et al. look at the popular craft in Indonesia, prevalent in most vernacular settlements. They examine the influence of contemporary fashion developments on the shifting meanings of hand-drawn Batik Lasem, in Indonesia. Finally, Ali Bassim Alfuraty and Nihad Abdulzahra Alkazaaly present to us the findings of a study examining cultural heritage. They focus on the impact of using heritage architectural elements in the facades of contemporary buildings: Shanashils are traditional vernacular elements that are being reproduced in the facades of contemporary houses in Iraq and they argue that the buildings with shanashils do express heritage architecture even though their use is merely decorative. People employ architectural heritage elements in the facades of houses to simply pacify the customers.

Overall, this issue of the ISVS e-journal—as it always is—has been a collection of very meaningful studies into the vernacular settlements as well as the human settlements in general bringing out insights hitherto not available. We are most encouraged by their contributions; indeed, we are thankful to all our authors for their great contributions.

**Dr. Ranjith Dayaratne**  
**Editor-in-Chief**