

# Reframing the Vernacular: Politics, Semiotics, and Representation

Gusti Ayu Made Suartika • Julie Nichols  
Editors

# Reframing the Vernacular: Politics, Semiotics, and Representation

 Springer

### *Editors*

Gusti Ayu Made Suartika  
Masters Program in Architecture  
and Development & Planning  
Udayana University  
Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

Julie Nichols  
School of Art, Architecture and Design,  
Vernacular Knowledge Research Group  
University of South Australia  
Adelaide, SA, Australia

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# Foreword

Vernacular architecture is contextual and particular in respect to place, geography and culture. Vernacular buildings and settlements involve uses of local resources, respond to local climate and produce regional and local identities. Rapid development, uncontrolled growth, urbanization and other forces of change have profound impacts on vernacular architecture. The challenges that face vernacular architecture are many. They range from commodification of culture through the use of vernacular building forms and appropriations of traditional materials by the tourist industry to mindless imitations of vernacular building elements so as to invent national or regional identities. As we become more global we also face the challenge of how to conserve, preserve and sustain local vernacular building practices and unique regional architectural and settlement characteristics. Within this context of continuity and change, discourses pertaining to the role and uses of vernacular architecture in terms of political contexts, meaning, and representation have not been adequately addressed as “themes” within contemporary conversations on vernacular architecture.

The First International Conference on Cultural Communication and Space (ICCCS) and the Ninth International Conference on Vernacular Settlements (ISVS) held at the Department of Architecture, Udayana University in Bali, Indonesia, November 28–29, 2018, brought together scholars and professionals from a wide variety of disciplines to participate in an international dialogue involving these less developed themes. Framed within the context of “vernacularity” and “culture” the conference attracted a wide range of scholars and professionals from a variety of disciplines to collectively focus on two areas. The first was our understanding of vernacularity in the context of “globalization, cross-disciplinarity, and development.” The second was to discuss how “vernacularity has been treated, used, employed, manipulated, practiced, maintained, learned, reconstructed, preserved and conserved, at the level of individual and community experience.”

Papers presented by participants in the conference addressed topics categorized into the following sub-themes:

- Transformation in the vernacular built environment
- Vernacular architecture and representation
- The meaning of home
- Symbolic intervention and interpretation of vernacularity
- The semiotics of place
- The politics of ethnicity and settlement
- Global tourism and its impacts on vernacular settlement
- Vernacular built form and aesthetics
- Technology and construction in vernacular built forms
- Vernacular language – writing and oral traditions

This book is a collection of papers from the conference. The scholarly writings and research investigations that make up this book represent a rich tapestry of case studies, points of view, arguments and readings that examine and reframe the complexities the vernacular within the frameworks of politics, semiotics, and representation. Together, the chapters in this book present a multi-disciplinary and international discourse about the place, relevance, perceptions, transformations and contemporary usefulness of vernacular built environments.

Department of Architecture  
Texas Tech University  
Lubbock, TX, USA

Joseph Aranha  
joseph.aranha@ttu.edu

# Preface

The word *vernacular* is widely circulated. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word as “the language or dialect spoken by ordinary people in a particular country or region”, or in regard to the built environment, vernacular implies “architecture concerned with domestic and functional rather than monumental buildings”. The use of the word vernacular has also been extended generically to embrace vernacular music, vernacular sport, vernacular crafts, vernacular literature, vernacular art, vernacular modernism, etc. In so doing, a variety of academic disciplines have become involved, to include architecture, anthropology, linguistics, cultural studies, and other regions of academic endeavour. Paradoxically, language itself also reveals other problems – some cultures do not have a word for *vernacular* and interpret implied meanings differently. We cannot even assume that an agreed cross-cultural meaning exists – some languages do not have the word *vernacular* in their dictionaries.

So *vernacular* has an immense range of meanings and contexts. Possibly, its widest use is in the area of vernacular architecture, a subject already explored in great depth. The purpose of this conference is to investigate three lesser developed themes: The first is the *political* context of vernacular subjects (such as architecture). The second addresses *meaning* in the vernacular. The third deals with how the vernacular is presented and *represented*. But we also know that these three regions overlap in complex ways and address a wide variety of themes. We seek to address such complexity by focussing on the interstices *between* subjects rather than on individual subjects such as architecture, culture, language, art, or design.

The word *vernacular* also conveys a state of being native, original, and contextual to geography and places. In many locations, it embraces entire environments, their art, culture, and the very existence of indigenous societies. How the word is to be comprehended is a moot point, but how a vernacular existence is to be understood and accommodated by postmodernity is a herculean task involving debate at an archaeology of levels. Hence, “vernacularity” is also part of the global equation. It has been a source of political and social conflict and dispute for decades over issues such as the survival of indigenous communities in places like Australia. The commodification of people and places, the strategy of global tourism, has deep

impacts on vernacular life, its customs, traditions, aspirations, and sensibilities. Accepting the inevitability of globalisation and its universal impacts on local cultures, we need to go no further than the conference venue in Bali to witness its effects. Here, we can observe the erosion of traditions, the designation of traditional villages as tourist destinations, the establishment of World Heritage Sites, and overall the redeployment of urban meaning to focus on the global over the local.

Given the complexity of the above situation, it is the prime goal of this conference to reflect this context and to invite participants from a wide variety of disciplines to participate in an international dialogue on “vernacularity” and culture. The conference therefore seeks to concentrate on two major domains. First, it attempts to reframe our understanding of vernacularity by addressing the subject in the context of globalisation, cross-disciplinarity, and development. Second, it discusses the phenomenon of how vernacularity has been treated, used, employed, manipulated, practiced, maintained, learned, reconstructed, preserved, and conserved at the level of individual and community experience. We therefore invite scholars from a wide variety of knowledge fields to participate in enriching and engaging discussions as to how both agendas can be addressed.

This international gathering has been initiated collaboratively by the Centre for Cultural Communication and Space (CCCS), the Research Centre for Smart City, Tropical Engineering-Architecture Program, and Master’s Program in Architecture of Udayana University, the University of South Australia and its Vernacular Knowledge Research Group (VKRG), and the International Society for Vernacular Settlement (ISVS). This event is also following the successful conduct of the 8th ISVS International Conference by the Department of Architecture of Hasanudin University in Makassar, Sulawesi, in 2016.

This international conference involved four keynote speakers including Emeritus Professor Anthony Reid (Australian National University, Australia), Emeritus Professor John Lang (University of New South Wales, Australia), Professor Abidin Kusno (York University, Canada), and Professor Ramesh Biswas (Austria). It has produced publications in the form of conference proceedings and journal articles. This scholarly work published by Springer represents the first category.

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Gusti Ayu Made Suartika  
Julie Nichols

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