

## ***Space and Identity: A Neo-Vernacular Approach in the Design of the Riau-Lingga Cultural Center in Lingga Regency***

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*Riau-Lingga;  
neo-vernacular;  
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identity*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the application of Neo-Vernacular Architecture principles in the design of the Riau-Lingga Cultural Center as a strategy to reinforce local identity amid the tide of modernization and shifting cultural values. The main objective of this research is to formulate a design approach that can revive the values, elements, and characteristics of traditional architecture of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate in the form of contemporary buildings that are relevant to today's needs. The method used is Research by Design, which includes pre-design stages of cultural data collection, vernacular element analysis, functional studies, and site context; followed by design exploration through mass studies and spatial experiments; and concluded with design evaluation of its success in representing local identity. The research findings show that the application of Neo-Vernacular principles, such as the use of local materials, climate responsiveness, reinterpretation of traditional roof forms, spatial hierarchy, the concept of stage buildings, verandas, and contextual massing, is capable of translating the cultural values of the Riau-Lingga Malay into a modern architectural form that remains rooted in tradition. Contemporary building technology is also selectively integrated to enhance functionality and comfort without compromising local character. Furthermore, community involvement in the design process strengthens the building's social and cultural relevance. This study concludes that the Neo-Vernacular Architecture approach effectively bridges tradition and innovation, and has the potential to make the Riau-Lingga Cultural Center a symbol of cultural regeneration and a reinforcement of Malay identity in Lingga Regency.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Identity, in its broadest sense, represents a perspective and category for understanding humanity, individuals, and society, which serves as a concept for describing how individuals and groups recognize themselves and are recognized by others based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture (Mikail & Aytekin, 2016). Similarly, the identity of a region describes the identity of that region itself, which is born not only from language and customs, but from a long process reflected through the history, social values, environment, and spirituality of a region.

Lingga Regency, an area nicknamed Bunda Tanah Melayu (Mother of Malay Land), was given this nickname because Lingga Regency is the birthplace, growth, and development of Malay customs and culture (Muhaimin Wahyudi et al, 2024). This nickname illustrates that Lingga Regency has an identity as an area steeped in Malay culture. Lingga Regency was once the center of the Malay Kingdom, namely the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, which was founded by Sultan Abdul Rahman Muazzam Syah in 1824 as a breakaway from the Johor Riau Sultanate under an agreement approved by Great

Britain and the Dutch East Indies. 1911, which was later controlled by the Dutch East Indies (Akbar et al, 2019).

With the long history of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, the dynamics of the relocation of the center of government and sultanate leadership have certainly left behind and passed on physical relics and ancestral values that shape the culture and identity of the Malay community. Although Lingga Regency has great potential as the heir to the glory of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, the passage of time, the impact of modernization and globalization, and changes in lifestyle have caused a shift in cultural values among the community. Malay values and identity, such as language, arts, oral traditions, and customs, which were once the foundation of social life, are now beginning to lose their meaning due to the lack of revitalization efforts and limited space for local expression (Suhardi & Astuti, 2021).

In an effort to stop the loss of local identity, communities need a forum and approach to express themselves, learn, and interact with other cultures, as well as strive to create a contemporary local identity without losing cultural values. The Riau-Lingga Malay Cultural Center, through its Neo-Verakular Architecture approach, serves as a strategic solution to represent the grandeur and preserve the values of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate in a modern context. This approach successfully blends local wisdom with modern systems and technology without losing its cultural essence (Hasibuan, 2022).

This space not only serves as a place to display artifacts and history, but also as a living space for art, performances, cultural research, and social interaction for the local community by giving it a new modern face while applying traditional values. With this approach, culture is no longer seen as a static heritage, but as something that is always alive and changing. The existence of this space can raise awareness among the community about their historical roots, revive traditions that are on the verge of extinction, and create a dynamic cultural regeneration amid modernization.

This research is based on two main issues. First, how to provide and create space for preserving and expressing the cultural values of Riau-Lingga. Second, how to bring back the values, forms, and identity of traditional (vernacular) architecture into modern buildings in a fresher, more contextual way that is in line with current needs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture is not only born from human actions, but also a reflection of how humans interpret their lives in the journey of space and time. It grows from how humans interpret the meaning of life, values, and relationships with each other and the universe. By understanding culture, humans are actually understanding themselves in terms of the roots, direction, and identity that shape their existence in the world. Culture is defined as a collection of values, beliefs, language systems, communication, and practices shared by a group and used to define their identity (Laguttseva-Nogina et al, 2024).

The Malay culture of Riau-Lingga is a form of maritime civilization that grew out of a fusion of Islamic values and local customs. In Riau-Lingga society, culture is not only interpreted as traditions passed down from generation to generation and expressions of aesthetics, but also as a system that guides morals and social values (Nurmalinda & Zulfa, 2024). Through traditional elements, language, religion, and maritime practices, these values are deepened and applied in everyday life and passed down from generation to generation.

This region has rich and layered cultural elements because it was once the center of a great Malay sultanate, including language, knowledge, tools and technology, social values, religion, livelihoods, and arts. With so many cultural elements inherited from the

Riau-Lingga Sultanate, it is certainly the responsibility of the Lingga government and community to preserve and protect this culture.

In addition to cultural elements and values, symbols and architectural elements are also important in strengthening local identity, which must be preserved and maintained. The architectural elements of Riau-Lingga Malay vernacular are as follow.

First is the stage building. Riau-Lingga is a maritime Malay civilization that lives and thrives on the coast, so the vernacular architecture of Riau-Lingga responds to the geographical context by incorporating stage elements into buildings that serve to circulate air, ward off wild animals, protect against tides or flooding, and function as storage spaces and venues for other activities. Then, the roof of Malay buildings in Riau-Lingga predominantly use gable roofs, multi-level pyramidal roofs, and folded roofs. They also use *serambi* (porch) as a space that functions as a public or social interaction area. A porch has a semi-open shape like a hallway located at the front or side of a building.

Malay houses feature a spatial hierarchy, such as a front/welcome room, a central/family room, a kitchen, bedrooms, and rooms for women and men, which are arranged according to social and cultural functions. Circulation patterns and orientation often take into account wind, sun, and access to water. For construction materials and techniques, the buildings use local materials that serve as structural and architectural elements, such as wood, leaves, and stone. In addition to the materials, the construction techniques are traditional techniques that are the result of a long process passed down from generation to generation, such as connection systems, material extraction methods, and material usage.

For ornaments, wooden ornaments (carvings on frames, moldings, wall curtains), geometric motifs, and Islamic influences (calligraphy, patterned motifs) appeared frequently, especially in public/religious buildings during the Sultanate era. Ornaments were taken from flora and fauna such as plants and animals. These ornaments served an aesthetic function while also signifying social status, building function, and identity. Penyengat Island, as the center of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, features a concentration of historic buildings (the Sultan Riau Grand Mosque, the former palace, the royal tomb complex) that differ in material and scale from ordinary traditional houses, marking their political-ritual function and maritime-regional network connections.

Amidst the dynamics of modern society, the Cultural Center has emerged as an important space that acts as an effort in the preservation, development, identity, and transformation of cultural values. It is within this Cultural Center that the cultural elements of Riau-Lingga are displayed and preserved, not only as a venue for artistic expression and tradition, but also as a meeting point between local heritage and the ever-evolving currents of globalization through its existence.

A cultural center is a multifunctional, interdisciplinary cultural institution or forum that provides access to culture and a variety of cultural services and activities, encourages citizen participation in culture, offers opportunities for learning and expression, and performs various other functions (Issues, Defining, and Centres, 2022). Cultural centers serve as formal platforms for the development, preservation, and dissemination of local and national cultural values through exhibitions, performances, education, and research. The presence of cultural centers supports the flow of globalization, which can weaken the younger generation's connection to cultural heritage, and serves as a public platform that plays a role in strengthening community identity, artist creativity, and cultural tourism (Amalia and Agustin, 2022).

With various roles and responsibilities, the cultural center is then realized through various main functions that are interconnected and support each other. These functions

form the basis for the management and implementation of cultural activities so that the objectives of preserving and developing culture can be achieved properly.

Cultural centers serve as strategic institutions for preserving, developing, and disseminating cultural heritage. Their existence is not only intended to protect artifacts and traditions, but also to encourage community participation through education, research, exhibitions, and creative programs that promote cultural regeneration and socio-economic contributions. In general, the main objectives of cultural centers are to ensure the continuity of cultural values, strengthen community identity, develop local creative capacity, and bridge tradition and innovation so that culture remains relevant and beneficial in the contemporary era (Amalia and Agustin, 2022).

With space as a place to preserve and express culture, an approach is needed to strengthen the cultural identity and the region itself. Therefore, the Neo-Vernacular Architecture approach is a solution in an effort to strengthen identity with local elements and features that are more contemporary or contextual to today's needs.

Neo-Vernacular architecture is a style that emerged in the post-modern era, combining vernacular architecture and modern architecture, each with its own distinctive characteristics in each region (Pratama et al, 2024). (Hasibuan, 2022) explaining that Neo-Vernacular Architecture is capable of combining local wisdom with modern systems and technology without losing its cultural essence.

Furthermore, Neo-Vernacular architecture plays an important role in preserving cultural heritage while adapting it to the needs of today's society. (Tiwari and Vij, 2024) emphasizes that this approach is significant in preserving cultural sustainability amid dynamic social change. Thus, Neo-Vernacular is not merely nostalgic for old forms, but also adaptive and progressive, creating a harmonious relationship between tradition and innovation through designs rooted in local identity and responsive to environmental and social contexts.

In addition to being a medium for preserving cultural values, neo-vernacular architecture also serves as a tool for strengthening the visual identity and built environment of an area. According to (Jegade and Enwonwu, 2025), Neo-Vernacular is a blend of traditional elements and modern design to create buildings that are in harmony with the local culture and environment. Meanwhile, (Bocco Guarneri and Habert, 2024), adding that this approach seeks to redefine local architecture that is relevant to the modern era. Through this principle, Neo-Vernacular architecture becomes a bridge that connects the cultural heritage of the past with the needs and technology of the future

The principles of neo-vernacular architecture are as follows: 1) use of local materials; 2) climate responsiveness; 3) elements and forms; 4) interpretation of traditional forms into contemporary language; 5) community involvement and local capacity building; 6) integration of modern technology and construction systems; 7) sustainability & circularity; and 8) landscape contextuality and place relevance.

## Methods

In this study, the method used is the Research by Design method, in which the design process itself is used as a research instrument and design experiment to produce conceptual products. (Roggema, 2017). In this case, the pre-design of a Riau-Lingga Cultural Center with a Neo-Vernacular Architectural Approach. This method begins with a pre-design phase consisting of analysis and collection of necessary data such as cultural context, function, theme, and issues, followed by a design phase consisting of exploration of building sketches and application of the analysis results, and ending with a post-design phase that evaluates the design concept, application, theme, and whether it represents local identity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Location

The location of the Riau-Lingga Cultural Center design is in Seranggung Village, Lingga District, Lingga Regency, Riau Islands 29872, precisely near the Bukit Cening (Benteng Bukit Cening) Fort area, which is one of the Cultural Heritage Sites in the form of a defensive fort of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. This site has a land area of approximately 10,000 m<sup>2</sup>, directly bordering the sea of Kelombok Island, with the location situated at an elevation of 100 meters above sea level.



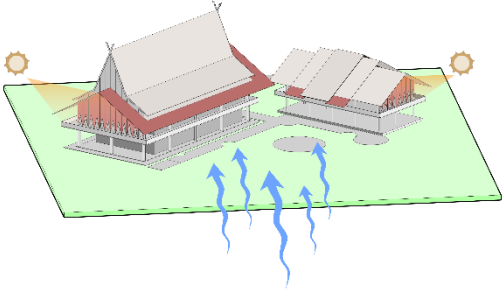
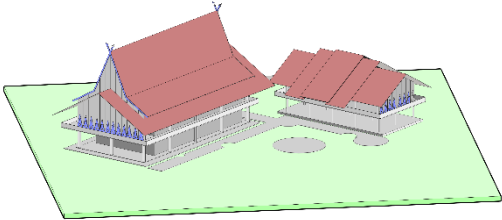
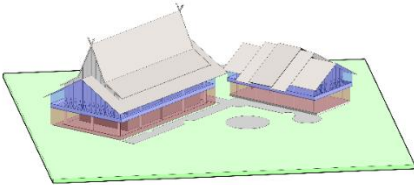
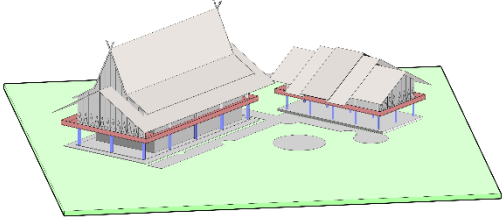
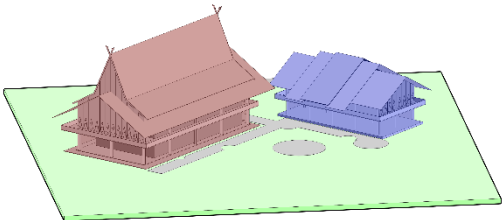
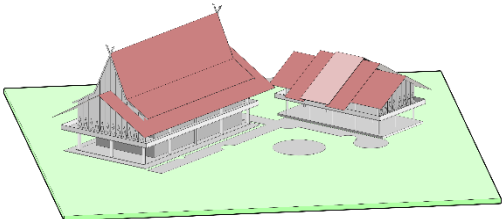
Figure 1. Design Site  
Sumber: Google Earth

### Concept and The Implementation

Inspired by the context of the site, which serves as a reference and guideline for the concept, the site is located in a cultural heritage site that is one of the defensive forts of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. Therefore, the concept adopted is "Cultural Fortress." This concept is interpreted as a symbol of the community's determination to preserve cultural values and identity amid the rapid pace of globalization and modernization. The application of Neo-Vernacular Principles and Riau-Lingga Vernacular Elements to Design can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1. Application Of Principles And Elements In Design

| No | Implementation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Design                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | <p>Material Use and Sustainability</p> <p>The use of materials in buildings prioritizes local materials and techniques such as local wood for walls and floors, and woven bamboo in some stone elements to maintain the cultural connection of the materials. The use of local materials is a sustainable building practice because it reduces costs and environmentally unfriendly materials.</p> | A 3D architectural rendering of a traditional building with a red roof and white walls, situated on a green base. The building has a multi-tiered roof and a small circular area in front of it. |

| No | Implementation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Design                                                                               |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2  | <p>Climate responsiveness and contextuality to the site</p> <p>The application of vernacular strategies in the form of larger roof proposals, the use of overhangs, building opening orientation, and the use of a second skin on buildings seeks to reduce direct sun exposure from the west and east and maximize openings on the north and south sides.</p>                                                                         |    |
| 3  | <p>Form and Elements</p> <p>Using varied roof shapes without losing their traditional value, and using elements such as typical Malay ornaments like puck rebung and selembayung on the buildings.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |    |
| 4  | <p>Spatial Hierarchy</p> <p>The spatial hierarchy in this building is applied to the zoning areas, where the first floor functions as a public area and the second floor functions as a semi-public and private area.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                              |   |
| 5  | <p>Stage and Veranda Structures (serambi)</p> <p>The application of stage elements in this building can be seen on the first floor, which is an open public area, and the second floor, which is more enclosed, so that the first floor is like being under a stilt house. The veranda in this building is located around the second floor, which juts out (cantilever)</p>                                                            |  |
| 6  | <p>Scale and Mass</p> <p>The buildings have different scales, indicating different functions, and the buildings have two masses. This is an application of the vernacular architectural values of Riau-Lingga, which take the form of complexes or separate buildings.</p>                                                                                                                                                             |  |
| 7  | <p>Technology and local community involvement</p> <p>The design seeks to apply traditional technological values to a more modern form. This is applied to some of the roofs using modern designs in the form of skylights and varied roof shapes. The community is involved in the design and management of the building so that the community can gain added value in terms of social, cultural, economic, and knowledge aspects.</p> |  |

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Neo-Vernacular Architecture approach is an effective strategy in designing the Riau-Lingga Cultural Center as a space for representing local identity amid the pressures of modernization. Through the integration of Riau-Lingga Malay vernacular elements such as stages, verandas, spatial hierarchies, local materials, and traditional roof shapes with contemporary technology and functional needs, the resulting design is able to present an adaptive, contextual, and sustainable cultural space. This approach not only strengthens the visual character and cultural meaning of the area but also encourages community participation and ensures the continuity of the values of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate's heritage. Thus, the Cultural Center designed through the Research by Design method has the potential to become a catalyst for cultural regeneration and a symbol of the resilience of Malay identity in Lingga Regency.

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