



New Trends in Critical Regionalism through the Lens of Tzonis and Lefaivre

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Abstract

The current study aims to consider the important thoughts about regionalism in architecture, its categories, in general, and “regionalism now”, in particular, from Tzonis and Lefaivre’s perspectives. We have been motivated by the last chapter of their book, *Architecture of Regionalism in the Age Globalization: Peaks and Valleys in the Flat World*, in the conceptual shift to an identical and cultural landscape, in addition to economical and specially, ecological aspects over the past two decades. Thus, it presents a re-reading of regionalism from a wider inclusive framework. This paper argues that critical regionalist architecture has entered a new stage in its evolutionary process. In this context, the main goal of this paper is to develop a set of criteria that will act as a tool for identifying “Regionalism Now”. Methodologically, based on qualitative content analysis and inductive logic, these criteria can be classified to achieve a comprehensive model. The new trends in critical regionalism move toward the concept of sustainable development. Sustainability which has been raised in the last decades of twentieth century has been coincided with “regionalism”. This concept addresses the negative environmental and social impacts of structure by utilizing design methods, materials, energy and development spaces that are not detrimental to the region ecosystem or communities. The philosophy is to ensure that the actions taken today do not have negative consequences for future generations and comply with the principles of social, economic and ecological sustainability of architectural practice.

Keyword: *Critical Regionalism, Sustainability, Globalization, Local Identity, Modern Architecture*

Introduction

The history of architecture in any region makes us aware of how closely and inextricably buildings are linked with the area in which they are located and how regional features are transmitted [1]. However, in today’s global world, most of urban areas are following up the status of globalization to become global centers rather than national centers in terms of relativity advantages, and architecture has made it possible for the city to dress up in such ensemble and lead its residents to live the global culture in actual spaces [2]. Thus, from architectural perspective, particular concern is the degree of control over the globalization. To what extent do architects have to respond to these inevitable processes? Can they control such trends and impose residents’ attitudes, sense of place, traditions and other local concerns? Modern architecture is related to the evolution of architecture globally, after the global phenomenon of industrialization, which seeks to universalize means of design and construction [3]. Thus, the issue that modernization, simultaneously, came in with phenomenon of globalization, should be considered. In architecture as well, the historical development of

globalization corresponds very closely to the ascendancy of modernism. Both globalization and international style (as a modernism production) have recognized architecture as a repulsive force to attain localization and heterogeneity, which is reflected in many studies. It has been recognized that globalizing forces of international modernism had a homogenizing tendency, eliminated the differences and obliterated the local identity [4; 5; 6; 7]. Subsequently, Post Modernism paradigm was a critical response to this but had a short life. In 1982, Kenneth Frampton, principally as a Modernist rebuff to the overt cultural symbolism of Post Modernism, published the first of a number of essays on “Critical Regionalism” to highlight what he saw as localizing tendencies in current Modernism [4]. Critical Regionalism is, in fact, opposed to the domination of modernism and the dummy scenography of postmodernism, and both paradigms failed to deal with human conditions based on his extreme positions in relation to historicism. Furthermore, Critical Regionalism was initiated as an approach by virtue of the aspirations of freedom that is linked to the nationalism, liberalism, anti-authoritarianism, and regionalism. So, beside its contradiction to cultural, social, and normative values, it interacts with and takes

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global advantages to strengthen the design and subsequently create a desirable sense of place. This article is about “regionalism”, once a valuable approach in architecture. Based on background of the study, this paper aims to review and open a new route to mediation between negative impacts of modern and postmodern architecture in the age of globalization and local identity, in one hand, and tradition and environment, in the other hand. Hence, the study presents a retrospect of the basic ideas of regionalism afresh, which in turn would provide insights towards the so-called “Regionalism Now”. It reviews and expands regionalism through the lens of Lefaivre and Tzonis; thus, it presents a re-reading of regionalism from a wider inclusive framework. In the last chapter of their book, *Architecture of Regionalism in the Age Globalization: Peaks and Valleys in the Flat World*, entitled “Regionalism Now”, Lefaivre and Tzonis have provided a platform, through which we could advance our understanding of new trends in regionalism, by introducing and illustrating the global examples, and the majority of these examples have been designed and implemented in the new century [6]. The paper opens with a theoretical review, presenting a criticism of modernism, globalization and international style. Then, applying qualitative content analysis based on inductive logic on textual data and the architectural practices mentioned in the last chapter of the book and by extracting the hidden concepts in it, the study gradually achieves more abstract levels of today's tendency. Achieving a framework that represents the latent orders and iterative patterns through the lens of Lefaivre and Tzonis could be the result of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Architecture in the Age of Globalization

Globalism is shaping everything, including our cultural, natural and built environment [8; 9] and continues to be a major issue for academic and professional studies carried out by social scientists, planners, economists, geographers, politicians, media and others. However, one aspect of globalization that has received somewhat less attention is how it has affected architecture. Global architecture contains aesthetic and technical codes that are devoid of borders, local distinctiveness and unique identity. The strength of this architectural trend lies in its ability to create an international language. Its weakness lies in its inherent detachment from the specific location where the structures are built and from the specific society using the architectural environment. [10; 11] pointed out that due to huge literature on globalization and many competing approaches jostling for primacy, any attempt to present a definition for globalization and architecture is doomed to failure. [12] In reference to the relationship between architecture and globalization, Adam states, “Architecture is a natural reflection of what is occurring in various contexts in society. Although architecture has an insignificant role

in human life, it brings together everything that is important to a community. Therefore, architecture can be a mirror for society and society can, in turn, be a mirror for architecture.” Globalization, as an influential phenomenon on all aspects of societies' life, is directly involved in the architecture of nations [13]. In fact, the globalizing forces of international modernism are believed to have eliminated differences, obliterated individual identities and led to more homogeneous architectural forms [7]. Hence, post-modernity in architecture started in 1960s, criticizing strongly the modern social problems and aesthetics. It rejected the belief in the “New” and called for the reinterpretation of culture and history, condemning the ‘zeitgeist’ that demolished the past and cultural differences. [2; 14] believe that postmodernism is actually a complex set of reactions that have been raised against the philosophy of modernism and its assumptions without the least compromise in the fundamental principles amongst the advocates of this paradigm. All of these factors give birth to regionalism as a best reflection to globalization, modernism and postmodernism in architecture.

2.2 Critical Regionalism: Background and Characteristics

Awareness of regional architecture as an indicator of a certain group identity dates back to ancient Greece. The Greek used architectural elements to represent the residents' identity in a region, in the context of the policy of control and competition in their cities and colonies. The most recognizable reference to the design can be seen in the Vitruvius's book “*Ten Books of Architecture*,” which is a Roman text and defines a regional concept for the building and its political implications [15]. Similarly, according to [7], Lefaivre pointed out, “Regionalism has been around for a long time. Vitruvius was the first to mention Regionalism. Since the renaissance we can call regionalism critical.” Regionalism represents the latest outcome of a process of modernization and can no longer be seen as a reactionary attitude [16]. Chris Abel stated, “It is in the countries of the Third World, where the effects of Modernism's break with the past have been compounded by a drastically speeded-up rate of development, that regionalism has a special meaning” [17]. These special meaning creates fundamental dichotomies between some concepts, such as adherence /reaction, imitation / invention and tradition / modernity. These contradictories along with questions about historiography, nationalist romanticism, the outer realm of theory and profession, and the concept of authenticity, represent the hidden challenge in the sense of regionalism [18]. The characteristics of regionalism are closely related to local culture, climate, and technology of the time [19]. According to [20], the characteristics of regionalism are as follows: (1) using local building materials with modern technology; (2) responding to the specific local climatic conditions; (3)

referring to tradition, historical heritage, and the meaning of space and place; (4) seeking meaning and cultural substance, not style/style as the final product. These characteristics, ultimately, strengthen the sense of place facing the space. Moreover, one should consider the difference between regionalism and critical regionalism because it “does not support the emancipation of a regional group nor does it set up one group against another” [21]. The name “Critical Regionalism” was first used by Tzonis and Lefaivre in “*The Grid and the Pathway*”, published in 1981, and it was later adopted by Kenneth Frampton in his essay “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance”, published in 1983. The latest definition of critical regionalism by Lefaivre and Tzonis has been according to the situation of contemporary architectural praxis in a book entitled, *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World* [22]. ‘It is important, at the outset, to note the dialogical relation permeating any interpretation of contemporary architecture and the meaning ascribed to the word critical therein’. Critical Regionalism calls for the preservation and the critical transformation of regional architectonic elements within a culturally relevant context. This gives local architectures unique identities which are capable of resisting the placelessness of modern and contemporary practices [23]. Additionally, as Frampton points out, critical regionalism should not be thought of as a vernacular that has emerged out of a collective set of conditions, but rather the regional ‘schools’ that are a reflection of an architect’s conscious response within the framework of a modern society [24]. If it was found difficult to define critical regionalism much beyond this and the definition lacked stylistic unity, this would be because it was a method or process rather than a product, and the process varied widely according to individual situations [25]. According to Tzonis and Lefaivre, being critical is essential. The fact that “regionalism” has become important does not mean that previous architectural approaches lacked a design element. However, the context of the waning popularity of international style architecture should be considered. For Tzonis and Lefaivre, an architect can criticize regionalism in two ways: the first is to investigate whether the regionalist tradition is legitimate, and the second is to use the method of ‘defamiliarization’ [21]. They suggested this modernist technique in their article, *Why Critical Regionalism Today?* [22]. This strategy, as Zarzar discussed, is the proposal of a critical evaluation of local culture, employing modernist strategies, which could be used to create the feeling of identity above a parochial regionalism [26].

2.3 Local and Cultural Identity: A Pivotal Role in Critical Regionalism

Identity in architecture depends on cohesiveness and a system of shared values. The failure of Le Corbusier's

Pessac housing in 1924 is one of the first tragedies that questioned modern architecture's radical ideas concerning local cultures. In Pessac, Le Corbusier injected the concept of "minimal dwelling" and a modern house as "a machine to live in", as was introduced in the first and second CIAM [27]. The culture of a region and its elements, as well as its sustainability in design and architecture depend on the skills or capabilities needed to create forms on the basis of regional culture [28]. Hartoonian states that Frampton was always aware of the necessity of the word "identity" in revealing the prosperity of an especial society. From his perspective, regional architecture is able to give this identity to society [29]. Thus, Frampton was particularly interested in those architects whose works were based on identity rather than aesthetics, historic and technological aspects. As for the importance of cultural and local identity, according to Ayci and Boyacıoğlu, [30] one can easily perceive that the concept of culture was given priority since it was discussed in three of the six resistance points of Frampton [4]: As the core of civilization, as the core of regionalism and universal culture, and as the point of impact between human artifact with nature within topography. In addition to context, climate and light are the local values waiting to be discovered by a critical regionalist architect, in addition to tectonic form, which should add poetic value to the culture of building. The tactile is introduced to architecture along with the visual to enrich the perceived architecture.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 “Regionalism Now” through the Lens of Lefaivre and Tzonis

This section argues that critical regionalist architecture has entered a new stage in its evolutionary process. Like architecture, regionalism concept has changed over time and is using and assimilating subtle points from contemporary urban and environmental dynamics as well as practices of vernacular forms in new contexts [31]. Base on critical regionalism theory and its architectural expressions in literature, a new theoretical and architectural concept called “Regionalism Now” is identified. This term is one of the developments of regional architecture that pays attention to the characteristics of regionalism, pertaining to local culture, environmental concerns, economic crises and technology. It defines the explicit or implicit results between society and architectural statement in a wide range of aspects such as identical, economic, semantic, temporal, cultural, technological and ecological aspects.

As [6] have given several examples of practical projects, since the last years of the twentieth century up to now, the theory of regional architecture has gained much attention from much more diverse perspectives and has become more extensive, and it fits more to its function.

In the last chapter of their book, *Architecture of Regionalism in the Age Globalization: Peaks and Valleys in the Flat World*, Lefaivre and Tzonis have provided a platform from which to advance our understanding of “regionalism now” by introducing and illustrating the global examples, and the majority of these works have been designed and implemented in the new century. They illustrate these characteristics on different layers using examples in the architectural works. From their point of view, ecology, culture and technology have the ability to create a new identity in the design of structure, dig into the past in term of region. They wrote that a new development enriching the critical regionalist approach goes beyond the objective of just minimizing the disruption of the landscape or hiding or blending the new structure, methods known since the picturesque, but engaging the new structure in a critical “dialogue” with the site, foregrounding its particularity. The means of engagement are either through the design of a “path”-“land art”, following the example of Benton Mackaye and Pikionis – or through abstract means. [6]. Lefaivre and Tzonis conclude that regionalism has the ability to fabricate imagined worlds, nationality and collective spatial memory within the landscape of region, and it has also been employed for economic advancement and then building a synthetic tourism paradise. In addition, regionalism has also been deeply involved in environmental and ecological issues. Ndubisi highlights that planning and design theory derived from ideas of sustainable regionalism, theories of natural regionalism, and of critical regionalism is reasonable solution to ever-growing urban world and universalization [32]. It amalgamates distinct ideas From the Geddes-MacKaye-Mumford-McHarg concept of natural regionalism, Kenneth Frampton's notion of critical regionalism, and the sustainable development paradigm, adapted to contemporary social, cultural, political, and ecological forces shaping the metropolitan’s landscape. In this line, [33] tries to explore the relationship between the experiences of sustainable architecture and regional architectural traditions as a means of explaining the alignment of current experiences of sustainable architecture and other cultural discourse of contemporary architecture. He noted that sustainable architectural practice is best achieved when the concept of regionalism is taken into consideration. This view addresses the negative environmental and social impacts of structure by utilizing design methods, materials, energy and development spaces that are not detrimental to the region ecosystem or communities. The philosophy is to ensure that the actions taken today don’t have negative consequences for future generations and comply with the principles of social, economic and ecological sustainability of architectural practice.

3.2 Best Practices on New Trends in Regionalism

New trends in regionalist architecture have been brought up simultaneously with sustainability paradigm. The link between regional architecture and sustainable development in addition to economic, social and especially ecological aspects, have been at the center of theoretical discussions and practices in the field of “regionalism now”. Especially, varieties of practices and regional plans have been developed in different parts of the world [6; 34]. Sustainable living and evolutionary adaptation can greatly influence the identity and subsequently cultural and environmental landscape. This effect associates not only with economic development, but also with tourism in a positive way. Thus, 12 samples of regional architecture works [35; 36; 37; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45; 46] based on new trends in regionalism were reviewed, and their characteristics and features have been presented according to the architect, location, and year of the project (Figure 1).

3.3 Expanding Criteria

There is a growing recognition for the important role of qualitative research and its usefulness in many fields, including architecture and urbanism. In this study, a method is used based on the qualitative method of systematic literature review to expand and develop regionalist architecture, and then the “Regionalism Now” indexes are extracted (Table 1).

In contrast to quantitative research methods, qualitative content analysis is not linked to any particular science, and there are fewer rules to follow. The qualitative content analysis method seeks to achieve a developmental model instead of looking for a major theory [47]. The path of qualitative content analysis is mainly from the text toward extracting the categories and then forming models. In the current study, the purpose of inductive research is to help the emergence of research findings in the form of an index table, considering the dominant and objective implications of the projects mentioned in Figure 1.

4. Conclusion

Since modern architecture denied history and geographical borders, it can be said that from the perspective of modern architectural movement, history and geography as the main principles of human culture have no significant impact on the development of architecture. Regionalism is a primitive concept based on traditional-communicational systems in which climate, geography, indigenous language, and region play a pivotal role in life cycle of buildings. These roles should be considered as tools of achieving the best design in response to sustainability. Critical regionalism has its roots deep in culture and nature. It involves a more direct resolution with nature compared to the more modern abstract avante-garde movements. Indeed, Critical Regionalist Architecture has entered a new

stage in its evolutionary process. The new trends in critical regionalism move toward the concept of sustainable development. Sustainability which has been raised in the last decade of twentieth century has been coincided with “regionalism now”. This concept addresses the negative environmental and social impacts of structure by utilizing design methods, materials, energy and development spaces that are not detrimental to the region ecosystem or communities. The philosophy is to ensure that the actions taken today don’t have negative consequences for future generations and comply with the principles of social, economic and ecological sustainability of architectural practice. This architectural concept is challenging the region’s past, present, and questioning its future self-critically. Therefore, the table and criteria of the study develop a framework that allows us to explore the “Regionalism Now” Indexes (as you can see in Table 1) through the lens of Lefaivre and Tzonis. Moreover, the effects of architecture on ecology, society, and economy have become one of the subjects of research and policies in recent decades in regionalism approach.

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