

Geography: A Hidden Antidote to Rescue Modern Architecture



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Abstract Critical regionalism can be seen as an approach to architecture that tries to stand up for places culture and identifies the identity of a place where modern architecture has failed to, by using the building's geographical context and reference of local characteristics. This idea was initiated by Lewis Mumford and then by Frampton, Tzonis, and Lefaivre. Frampton in his essay argues that it is critical to adopt universal values of modernism, taking into account the geographical context of the building. He refers directly to the climate, light, topography, and local tectonic form, which should be understood as historical and geographical conditions of the construction industry. This study discusses the critical regionalism theory and its geographical expressions in architecture. The paper opens with a theoretical review, presenting a criticism of modernism and the role of geographical factors as a hidden antidote to rescue modern architecture. Thus, geography gives us an incredible lens through which to see the architecture and their elements. These statements raise the question of what is architecture pertaining to geography. What can still be used to identify the originality of a place or region when globalization and cultural homogenizing are ever-growing and, in many cases, have ceased to exist? Perhaps the most powerful story here is the narrative of how geographical aspects make it possible to trigger critical regionalism as a powerful paradigm in contemporary architecture.

Keywords Geography · Critical regionalism · Modern architecture · Place · Identity

1 Introduction

Geography has preceded, subsist and will endure, while our civilizations will pass away.
Le Corbusier

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Modern architecture is a consequence of the universal evolution of architecture which occurred after the global phenomenon of industrialization; itself being a result of the proliferation of design and construction equipment. Even though the issue of regionalism is historically prior to modernism, through the advent of modernism and the dominance of separating object from subject, a concern was raised as in how to still maintain paying attention to the place identity in such an environment and from an outside standpoint. Since those times, one of the major orientations in architectural criticism has been the issue of regionalism. According to this approach, architecture should profoundly follow specific regional pragmatics based on climate, geography, local materials and cultural traditions. This argument stems from which that the compactness of time and place in relation to modernity has changed the shape of social life in which there is a kind of integration and shared values that includes all human societies at any time and place. It has been recognized that globalizing forces of international modernism had a homogenizing tendency, differences elimination, local identity obliteration and remove the geographical boundaries (Frampton 1983; Lehmann 2016). Aided and abetted by homogenizing impacts of the form of globalization, some changes have led many to argue that architecture as an outcome for identity and place have lost their importance.

In fact, the same discussion on the degree of influence and control on the process of globalization and the international style in regionalist architecture is considered as the main concern. The universalization of technology and design may ignore specific local culture and geographic requirements. The term International Style captured the mood of this universal architecture. In this regard, critical regionalism can be understood in terms of anti-globalization, as the main focus is to reintroduce the place and identity into buildings (Abu Hammad and Abu Hammad 2017). The multiplication of critical regionalisms in the world, which is certainly a consequence of globalization, represents an immense intellectual challenge because it confronts every citizen of the world with an increasingly larger range of regional cultural expressions (Botz-Bornstein 2015). In this line, since the final decades of the last century to the present day, there have been numerous researches on the subject of regionalism in architecture, particularly about understanding concepts, backgrounds and criteria, as well as reading them in various geographical contexts (Tzonis and Lefaivre 1981; Frampton 1983; Curtis 1986; Frampton 1987; Eggener 2002; Lefaivre and Tzonis 2003; Canizaro 2007; Colquhoun 2007; Shadar 2010; Carlson-Reddig 2011; Tzonis and Lefaivre 2012; Nolan 2014; Haggerty 2017; Bahga and Raheja 2018; Le 2018; Salman 2018; Zoghi Hoseini et al. 2018).

Critical regionalism can be seen as an approach to architecture that tries to stand up for places culture and identifies the identity of a place where modern architecture has failed to, by using the building's geographical context and reference of local characteristics. This idea was initiated by Lewis Mumford¹ and then by Tzonis and

¹ It is not quite plausible to fully define the regionalism of Mumford, for it did go through a lot of change and development throughout his career. Lefaivre and Tzonis argue that Mumford "did not make things easy for anyone wishing to get a clear overview of his regionalist paradigm" (Lefaivre and Tzonis 2003).

Lefavre (1981, 2012), Lefavre and Tzonis (2003) and Frampton (1983, 1987). In one of the early endeavors to the notion of regional characteristics, Lewis Mumford discussed this topic in his lectures during the first half of the twentieth century, in which he marked the regional aspects of architecture in confrontation with the universal and international style. Frampton in his essays argues that it is critical to adopt universal values of modernism, taking into account the geographical context of the building. He refers directly to the climate, light, topography, and local tectonic form, which should be understood as historical and geographical conditions of the construction industry (Frampton 1983). In fact, the term regionalism was not the innovation of these architects and did not offer a new concept. They chose this term, since this new movement was similar to the extensive efforts of architects who were looking for an alternative approach—in designing buildings, landscapes and cities—which could carry the geographical features of a unique environment along with the specific cultural traits of that region (Tzonis and Lefavre 2012).

The aim of this chapter is to explore the geographical features that contributed to architecture in the globalization context. From a geographic viewpoint, it is obvious that any regional characteristic has to be supported. The premise that underlies the exploration is that the geographical characteristics such as climate, topography, spatiality, place identity, surrounded environment and sustainability as a hidden antidote to rescue modern architecture. Thus, geography gives us an incredible lens through which to see the architecture and their elements. These statements raise the question of what is architecture pertaining to geography. What can still be used to identify the originality of a place or region when globalization and cultural homogenizing are ever-growing and, in many cases, have ceased to exist?

This paper begins with a review of region and regionalism as a pivotal sub-discipline in geography and then, relevant concepts and theoretical underpinnings of critical regionalism: regionalism as it is currently utilized, as well as relevant studies that link regionalist architecture to geographical effectiveness. A framework for this study is developed. Context for this framework is provided with a discussion of critical regionalism and their characteristics and their specific geographical needs.

1.1 Region and Regionalism: A Geographic Viewpoint

Region is an interpretation of geography, identity, plus cultures and institutions. Region in its origins denotes line, direction, as well as area and section. A region's specific characteristics are due to having traits and features based on that same area, which make region a fundamentally geographical term. This concept has a long academic history, dating back to the geography of Strabo. However, “the first systematic definition of the notion of region was made by Herbertson in an article dated 1905. With regard to its more methodological aspects, it can be said that the purpose of this author is to create a “systematic geography” and seeks to find geographical divisions orders on the globe” (Betioli Contel 2015; Jones 2019). Pursuant to this, efforts conducted in developing regional studies in the 1980s led to a general belief

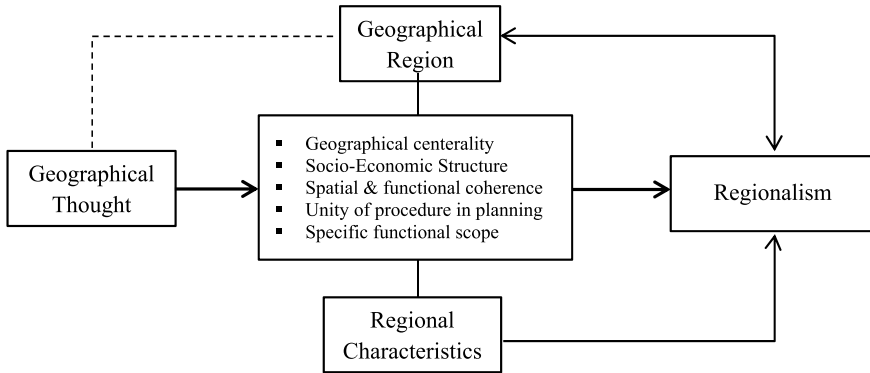


Fig. 1 Theoretical diagram of regionalism via geographic viewpoint

that geography could play a central role in social understanding (Bradshaw 1988). Nowadays regional studies have known as a vital part of geographical disciplines. The study of the essence of regio referred to the fundamental works of many geographers (Mumford 1938; Bradshaw 1988; Terlouw 2001; Paasi 2003; Howell 2013; Betioli Contel 2015; Jones 2019).

The concept of regionality depends on its being possible to correlate cultural codes with geographic regions (Mahgoub 2007). The significance would be for Alexander Von Humboldt in the study of geography of flora, the characteristics of a landscape, which is the most highlighted mark of a region (Silva et al. 2015). From Mumford's perspective (Mumford 1938), the meaning of region is the concept of geographical unit. Indeed, regionalism has a meaning beyond physical attention and toward spatial characteristics.

According to him, the region can be divided from bottom to top; from the smallest unit of human habitation, in terms of functions, activities and interests, or mainly from top to bottom; based on the features of the land, climate, plant and animal life which help distinguish between regions. By adding human beings to this image, the differences become more subtle and diverse (Fig. 1).

1.2 *An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*

Geography is often an analytical key factor to support the design of an architectural practice and can influence design choices such as color, materials, lighting, or structural elements of a building. A growing number of studies have discussed how geographers and other researchers might effectively analyze and study the built environment in a manner which not only acknowledges, but also surpasses representational readings of historical content and symbolism in various architectural forms. Accordingly, architects highlighted that not only design is influenced by the physical attributes of a location, like its climate, topography and site features, but is

also influenced by the social attributes of a geographical area as well, like its culture, perception, design style or history (Rapaport 1977; Frampton 1983, 1987; Lees 2001; Jacobs 2006; Popescu 2006; Kraftl and Adey 2008; Jones 2019; Kraftl 2010). In this line, Boussora (1990) noted that the characteristics of both physical place (such as climate, topography, landscape, and local vegetation) and local society (as adapt to the current social communal needs of the residents, the local construction tradition, and the local resources) are the factors of local architectural contents.

The diversity of architecture, from Vitruvius's perspective, is the result of the physical, mental and behavioral features of the people, and is essentially defined by geography (Eggeneer 2002). It is also notable for Tzonis and Lefaivre (2012) that Vitruvius—in addition to architectural issues—discusses geopolitical and global concepts which are divided into regions lacking equal quality. He declares that just as natural and climatic conditions influence building design, human beings are affected consequently. Vitruvius, for example, argues that a moderate environment forms a moderate architecture and, as a result, breeds moderate people; and he believes this environment to be a superior one. Or could it be that harsh environmental conditions would make different types of people evolve, both in terms of lifestyle and physical and behavioral perspectives.

In contemporary architecture practices in the world, it is nearly impossible to see the implicit meaning without footprint of geography or as Gausa et al. (2003) stated: "Architecture really belongs to another meta-discipline: Geography." Mostly geographical features are hidden behind the designed images, signs, and structure. From Maudlin view, architecture is an inclusive social study. He emphasizes that architectural boundaries cannot be limited to a specific spatial or temporal realm: "Different places have a different geology and a different environment, so different materials are available; ordinary people with limited resources and limited cultural networks can act only within their local geographical limits. This thinking reveals the influence of post-war functional determinism" (Maudlin 2010). Similarly, Kingston Heath argues in *Vernacular Architecture and Regional Design: Cultural Process and Environmental Response* that architecture is not merely a technical or aesthetic experience, but is inextricably linked to similar environmental and social processes (Heath 2009). In the meantime, major cultural styles and principles, plus their chronological alternations have come into existence through human history, while climatic diversity, along with ecological manifestations, such as language, artworks, or architecture depend to some extent on geography (Popescu 2006, 2008).

Lees (2001) argues that architectural geography should transcend mere representation. She examined earlier architectural geographies—from the Berkley School too political semiotics—and asserted that geographers haven't had a great deal to say about the practical and influential or nonrepresentational importance of architecture. Therefore, she employed the dispute over Vancouver's new public library building as a jump-off point for portraying how geographers might assume a more critical and politically progressive architectural geography. The Colosseum design of the library denotes the origins of the western civilization, which to some Vancouver residents is an aloof portrayal of their beloved multicultural city. Her aim is to push geographers

over this contemplative cultivation of architectural form toward a livelier interaction with the building.

To engender interdisciplinary dialogue, Craggs et al. (2013) put forward the concept of “architectural enthusiasm” and highlighted the relationship between architecture and geography with emphasis on relationship between people, buildings, and place. There are three ways they contribute to recent projects on the built environment and architectural geography: first, the importance of people’s emotions is highlighted through their engagement with the buildings, which is of a shared and exercised nature; second, they emphasize the role of architectural enthusiasts as influential agents with the ability to reform and shape the built environment; and third, they help establish connections with constructions through maintaining the practice of integrating urban exploration, local history, architectural practice, education and training and finally, a vast range of architectural tourism.

1.3 The Spatiality of Architecture

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, architecture has always been known to fundamentally be engaged with space, which forms its nucleus (Popescu 2006; Dursun 2012). Space is also known as the nucleus of geography (Massey 2005). However, according to Hilde Heynen, architects and geographers do not necessarily need to offer similar definitions of space (Heynen 2013). It is not often known for the practitioners and scholars of either geography or architecture to formally link these two fields together. In this regard, Jacobs and Merriman define space from the mentioned scientists’ point of view as follows: architecture lies at the core of a design-oriented discipline with a tendency to reform the space, while geography is at the core of an analytical order toward prescribing and recognizing existing spatial conditions (Jacobs and Merriman 2011, p. 219). Colquhoun (1989) identifies the discrepancies in attitudes toward space and identity among geographical and architectural sciences by attending to form and function. In his view, there are basically two approaches toward form and function: one that considers form as independent from function, and one that considers function to actually determine form, which advocates a direct interaction between them; the second view being closer to that of geographers. However, Krafl believes the advent of cultural geography to be the study of form in architecture, and perceives the contemporary architectural geography within cultural geography (Krafl and Adey 2008; Krafl 2010). Yet, Madanipour (1996) points out that architecture is always eventually interested in form. Indeed, this mere passion for form-production is more likely observed in a type of architecture leaning toward modernism. This approach is clearly at odds with the Newtonian physics, and as Ando puts it: “a place is not an absolute space of Newtonian physics. It is a universal one; a space with meaningful orientation and heterogeneous density.” According to Ando, the nature of architecture and its ultimate purpose is to create space. He continues: “Architecture is not only concerned with manipulating forms,

but I also believe that architecture is the construction of a “space,” and most importantly, the construction of a “place” which acts as the foundation for space.” (Shirazi 2012).

Christian Norberg-Schulz in the book *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* describes the recognition of spatial features as one of the fundamental pillars of architecture and insists on pay attention to and shape these factors while designing (Norberg-Schulz 1980). For McNeill these spatial features are appropriate for clarifying such architectural meaning, because of the rich geographical theory available pertaining to place-making and identity of place (McNeill 2005). Person concentrates on methodologies assembled by geographers whose analytical researches seek architectural definitions through various geographic viewpoints and reaches a conclusion by suggesting how these perspectives might be applied through a single-building study. Incorporating issues about *place* into architectural studies paves the way for a keenly phenomenological comprehension of the built environment (Person 2011).

This discussion is developed by Gissen (2010) under the title of “territorial architecture,” which recognizes architecture as a broader concept within the patterns and frameworks of geographical and environmental perceptions, aspiring to emerge out of environment, nature, society and technology; while an independent architecture can merely be accountable to itself. He points out that the writings of critical geographers can be very constructive, since while taking advantage of many scientific theories and philosophical critiques, they tend to always look toward aesthetic and spatial ideas and environmental concerns.² However, most architects also accentuate the break of architecture from a one-dimensional architectural speculation in the form of its independence—or what James (2013) defines specifically as “building”—and its move toward a comprehensive and spatial design. Similarly, Kenneth Frampton (1991) uses the term “the least autonomous” for architecture as another cultural production, recognizing it not only by his own technical methods, but also by the forces generated outside and around it. In this regard, the book *Indigenous Capitals of Africa* comes to mind, where Adjaye considers most native buildings in Africa to be a direct response to climatic conditions. Referring to his book, he indicates just how African cities are responsive to different climates. He divides cities into six different geographical regions and depicts the interaction between a set of general conditions and their locations; such as temperature range and seasonal rainfalls, plus how they affect vegetation and landscape, and moreover, the manner of people’s adaptation to these conditions in their own vernacular architectural style (Adjaye 2013).

² Interestingly, Warf and Arias (2009, p. 1) highlighted that Geography, “has transformed into one of the most dynamic, innovative and influential of the social sciences”, and that it “has moved decisively from being an importer of ideas from other fields to an exporter.”

1.4 Regionalism and the End of “The End of Geography”

Through time, globalization and regionalism have been in conflict with one another. This is due to the fact that globalization has always had the tendency to level the barriers for the purpose of interaction between places and transforming isolated areas in order to create a homogeneous world (Hettne and Söderbaum 2002; Lefavre and Tzonis 2003, 2012). The contemporary understanding of the nature of regionalism has abandoned the geographic determinism of the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries (geographical region as a natural region), giving way to an intellectual domination, and as a result, globalization—relying on factors such as neoliberalism, rationality, post-industrial capitalism, worldwide communication, universal awareness, organizational developments, and financial markets—took on an extranational form. Indeed, regionalist theories have gone through change in several aspects. Non-territorial geography, semanticism, multidimensionality, and democratic pluralism are among the most important theoretical changes.

Paul Vidal de la Blache as a French geographer tried to find a measure of defining the identity of a region and especially the environmental factors influencing the region, as he says, “the geographic personality”.³ He added human approach to the geographical milieu that focuses just on the “natural determinations” of regions. “The Isolated State” (1826) Johann Heinrich von Thünen developed a model that is considered to be the first serious treatment of spatial economics and economic geography—connecting it with the theory of rent. With organizing regions in this book, he considered an ideal and isolated state in a completely homogeneous area. According to Tzonis and Lefavre (2012), Von Thünen used geographical keywords such as “place”, “center” and “region” and his model was a brief view of the world. After him, other scientists like Walter Christaller⁴ presented their models. This generation of researchers was trying to present realistic models against what is called globalization.

Globalization is the compression of time and geographical space that has eliminated geographical distances due to new technologies (Harvey 1989). The constraints of geography are shrinking and the world is becoming a single place (Waters 2001). This quote of Waters is indeed that “the end of geography” (O’Brien 1992), “death of distance” (Cairncross 1997), “borderless world” (Ohmae 1995), and “the world is flat” (Friedman 2005), which have been mentioned in numerous studies. However, this hypothesis has been challenged by the historical trajectory as well as the economic, political, social, cultural and institutional characteristics of different regions and cities. Indeed, opponents of the idea of “the end of geography” claim

³ For Vidal de la Blache, “geographic personality”, a fundamental concept in the *Tableau de la Géographie de la France* (portrait of French geography) (1903), refers to the ingenuity shown by each human group—and, more specifically, each people or nation—in taking full advantage of the resources drawn from the milieu in which it lives (Mercier 2009).

⁴ Walter Christaller was a German geographer whose principal contribution to the discipline is Central Place Theory, first published in 1933.

that globalization brought about poverty, anxiety, and a decline in the quality of the environment (Warwick 2005; Harvey 2006; Christopherson et al. 2008; Cox 2008).

Concepts such as cumulative economics, tacit knowledge, face-to-face communication, social capital, and organizational networks aligned with the development of innovative procedures have reached success. Therefore, the processes of “globalization” and “localization” are not separate concepts, rather intertwined ones (Morgan 1997). Or as Dicken puts it, globalization—in its very broad meaning—does not portray the end of geography, but in fact, is geography itself (Dicken 2009, p. 563). Geography’s traditional authority reveals that not only is it sustainable, but globalization has even vastly promoted it; since due to its enlightening tendencies, it has a universal nature. Despite the debates on globalization, it must be acknowledged that localization and regionalism are gaining more power. As a result, we have to oppose the death of geography, since it is developing, not perishing. A closer look at this subject reveals the growth and proliferation of both localization and globalization in their cultural, historical and particularly geographical aspects. Regionalism expresses a tendency to oppose globalization, which creates a different understanding of space creation and landscaping. Globalization does not highlight the importance of land, but regionalism promotes its significance. Rise of local identity sentiments, reinforcement of economic activities, and the changing nature of political activities are at this level only a part of a larger-scale process of structural changes. Globalization in no way eliminates other geographical scales; but by intensifying them, regionalism and localization lead to growth and can balance the opposing changes.

2 The Failure of Thesis and Antithesis

2.1 *Toward the Emergence of Regionalist Architecture*

Through the critique of modern and postmodern architecture, the paradigm shift is best understood. In modernism, regionalism approach was mainly defined as a confrontation with a form of universalization. Frampton believes that culture is under attack by Modernism’s optimizations by restricting it (Frampton 1983). Hartoonian (2014) states that Frampton was always aware of the necessity of the word identity in revealing the shaping of society’s flourishing. From his perspective, regional architecture is able to induce this identity to society. Thus, Frampton was particularly interested in those architects whose works were on basis of identity rather than aesthetics, historic, and technological. Furthermore, all three writers, Mumford, Tzonis and Lefaivre, have a similar concern for the boldness of technology in Modern architecture and the consequences of the International Style (Panicker 2004).

After this time, a large number of architectural innovations which used to be considered beautiful and a reminiscent of progress and prosperity got demolished.⁵

⁵ Occasionally, this has occurred due to depopulation and consequently, insecurity; such as what happened to the Pruitt-Igoe complex.

At that same time, Charles Jenckes—the historian and architectural critic—in his book *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), named and developed the new pattern which Robert Venturi had previously embarked upon in architecture. After countless failures of modernism, it was replaced by postmodernism since the end of World War II; a period in which a great deal of inefficient buildings and unpleasant urban projects were executed. In actuality, as a response to this identity crisis brought about by modernism, postmodernism was born in form of an antithesis to criticize the modern identity. Postmodernism believes that identity is not necessarily or consistently a fixed notion, but is changeable and dynamic. Therefore, most scientists and researchers agree on this interpretation of the postmodernist philosophy that in fact, postmodernism is an outgrowth of modernism and an attempt to find answers to the problems of the modern era and a break from the deadlock of modernism.⁶ Initially, postmodernism was greeted with astronomical progress and popularity; however, it was not long before people realized that postmodernist projects—very much like modernist ones—had not earned due success, since similar to their preceding modernist generations, they maintained building and presenting fanatical global models, regardless of environmental characteristics, social individuality and the cultural unity of the regions they were performing construction projects in. In this regard, Harvey argues that postmodernism represents a crisis in modernism during which disintegration, political multiplicity, and transition are consolidated and established. This is while the possibility of any kind of consistency, stability of unity, community, unity, longevity and durability is accompanied by excessive skepticism and pessimism. He sees postmodernism as a complex set of reactions to the philosophy of modernism and its presuppositions, without the slightest agreement on the fundamental tenets of those who believe in it (Harvey 1989, 1992).

Postmodernism as an antithesis against the thesis of modernism produced a short-lived spectrum of critical studies that redefined many aspects in architectural fields and produced a superficial style that dominated the profession. With the postmodernist trend, these architects tried to reconcile their designs with the local context, but unfortunately this trend was very transient due to the rapid industrialization and internationalization of architecture. Thus, critical regionalism rejected the universalization and international style of modernism and also, ornamentation approach

⁶ David Harvey begins the discussion on globalization with the analysis of space and time from pre-modernist periods and continues to compare the endurance of this process to two explosions. He attributes the first explosion to the crisis of over-accumulation in the capitalist system, which took place in the second half of the nineteenth century and was accompanied by a so-called “modernist” cultural movement. Another explosion occurred in 1970 (the symbolic end of modernism) with the density of time and space. This transformation began with the crisis of over-accumulation in the mass-production system (the advent of postmodernism). In fact, it is modernism and postmodernism which have provided the grounds for the manifestation of globalization. The subject and connections of modernism, postmodernism, and globalization have been sources for the theoretical thinking of various scholars, but the prominent figure who has actually established this connection is David Harvey. He believes that postmodernism is the unfinished project of modernism, since postmodernism has emerged after the crisis of modernism and globalization since has become a hallmark of finding a way out of the stalemate of capital accumulation in the capitalist system (Waters 2001).

of Postmodernism.⁷ (Frampton 1987; Lefaivre and Tzonis 2003; Moore 2005/2007; Tzonis and Lefaivre 2012; Abu Hammad and Abu Hammad 2017).

2.2 *The Question of Critical Regionalism*

What is a critical regionalism? Is it a state of mind or attitude of architects? Is critical regionalism a dedicated approach for architecture to attract more attention and to better competition in awards? Or, alternatively, is critical regionalism focus on the question of how to challenge the effects of globalization through locality? Can critical regionalism be regarded as a guideline for a desirable style? Similar questions and arguments hold also for the concept of a critical regionalism, which has also prompted heated debates.

Critical regionalism remains a nascent field of study within the architectural field. It is not only regionalism but it is a progressive approach to seek answers from global and local language of architecture. Shadar (2010) discusses that “Critical Regionalism theory and its architectural expressions in literature have a prominent characteristic of local architectural shortage: the ability to change and adapt to the varying human and cultural conditions of the residents using them.” Indeed, from his point of view, an architecture practice should interact with history, beliefs, and its own time and place. In architecture, the concept of Critical Regionalism gained popularity as a synthesis of universal, modern elements, and individualistic elements derived from local cultures (Botz-Bornstein 2015).

This term was initiated as an approach by virtue of the aspirations of freedom that is linked to the nationalism, liberalism, anti-authoritarianism, and rationalism. The name Critical Regionalism was first used by Alexis Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in *The Grid and the Pathway* (1981), and it was later adopted by Kenneth Frampton in his essay *Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance* (1983) and expansion and revision of these points in *Ten Points on Architecture of Regionalism: A Provisional Polemic* (1987). Frampton highlighted that the critical nature of his essays is confrontation with placelessness and uniformity. He draws attention to recognizing the region, native building in respect to light, wind and temperature conditions, all of which require an architectural response that deserves a special place.

The six points of Frampton were inspired from a passage from Paul Ricoeurs *History and Truth* that Frampton quoted as a starting point in his article (Frampton 1983). Indeed, critical regionalism is to seek answers to the question of Paul Ricoeur: “How to be modern and to continue the tradition, how to revive an old dormant civilization as part of universal civilization.” Frampton argued against the pervasiveness and apparent inappropriateness of International Modernism in favor of an architecture that was distinct in its local feature and identity. The phenomenon of

⁷ Critical regionalism (according to Eggener 2002), even though a reaction to modernity, is difficult to be distinguished from postmodernism; whether it is in itself antithetical to it or accompanies it.

globalization—while being one of the major advancements of mankind—constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures—which may not be an irreparable harm—but also what shall for the time being called “the creative nucleus of great cultures;” the nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life and shall in advanced be called “the ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind.” (Ricoeur 1965, pp. 276–277).

It is not modernism which is denied by many regionalist architects, but mainly an international and universal style as a result of globalization. During the final years of the 1960s, many people—especially some particular architects—initiated the revision in the international style (Steyn 2014). Because they believed that the implicit concepts of modern architecture—not the international style—were sometimes misinterpreted in terms of environment and surroundings. A prominent example of such architects would be the Indian architect, Charles Correa, who had studied in the United States and eventually used his knowledge and native background to create a new style in his own cultural and geographical context. His most outstanding works show the close connection he had managed to establish with the environment (Lefaivre and Tzonis 2012, p. 163). Although he used territorial architecture as an inspiration, it led him to very creative architectural experiences. His approach was most discernibly regional. In a project titled the Tube House in Ahmedabad, India—which was completed in 1964—he created a wide opening in the house in order to expel the hot air outside and direct the cold air inside, at the same time. Blending traditional aspects with new clever ways to promote the interior has made this project into a regional project in Correa’s critical view. He holds the opinion that contemporary architecture mainly necessitates an understanding of principles and adapting them to local materials, habits, climates, and traditions, which can help modify architecture according to local conditions and identities. He considers the concept of climate as a fundamental determinant of structural forms, cultures, and traditions of various nations (Correa 1983).

In his writings, Kenneth Frampton mentions the work of Tadao Ando—the Japanese architect—and introduces him as a regionalist. He declares that Ando’s work is conceptually “critical,” since it culturally opposes the instrumentalism entailed the development of the megapolis of Tokyo, and resists the growing consumerism of the modern city (Frampton 1988). However, in this regard, Ando has neither spoken of the term critical regionalism for his work nor objected to the given label. Ando claims that his job is to create places that express regional, cultural and geographical features and establish a relationship between humans with nature as well as other people. Ando states that the universe is not an integrated space, but essentially consists of “topoi” in concrete spaces. These “topoi” are in fact heterogeneous, yet interconnected units, and their diversity relates profoundly to history, culture, climate, topography and urbanization. He also states that architecture has created a new perspective and is thus responsible for extracting the special features of the supposed region. One of the measures in Frampton’s critical regionalism is a direct dialectical affiliation with nature; a conversation with the environment that Ando’s architecture embodies in a structural relationship through changing the impacts of

light and land side effects. This dialogue is well illustrated in Rokko Housing (1978–1983) in Kobe, Japan. Rokko Housing is marked by a 60-degree slope at the foot of Mount Rokko. Avoiding the modernist approach of tabula rasa in leveling the site for construction, Ando chose his building on a steep slope to create a “quiet structure; erected wholly in nature,” which would maintain the tectonic quality of the uneven piece of land.

Critical regionalism necessarily involves a more direct discourse with nature, compared to the abstract and formal type of modern and avant-garde contemporary architecture (Frampton 1983). What is evident about topography, also applies to a similar degree of an existing urban fabric and this matter can also be claimed for climatic probabilities and local qualities of light. Frampton moreover emphasizes that incorporating these factors must fundamentally oppose the optimal use of global techniques. In fact, critical regionalism—in opposition to modernization—uses site topography as a crucial element of its regional geography. Destroying the site in order to level the land and consequently reducing costs and increasing efficiency can be considered as a gesture of sheer placelessness. This occurs when the geographical features of a site are not taken into account in the process of architectural rationalism.

2.3 Coda-Geography: A Hidden Antidote to Rescue Architecture

This study discusses the critical regionalism theory and its geographical expressions in architecture, presenting a criticism of modernism and the role of geographical factors as a hidden antidote to rescue modern architecture. Thus, geography gives us an incredible lens through which to see the architecture and their elements. It nevertheless seems that the subject of the relationship between geography and architecture has been abundantly explained and expanded in the studies of many geographers and architects. However, given the pervasion of principles such as change and multiplicity in structures governing the global way of thought, ambiguities and daily complexities will most probably overshadow the nature of the issue. Moreover, the method of attending to the geographical context faces diverse attitudes and there is no one standard in this regard. Therefore, in many cases, theorists have highlighted the role of architects in properly defining and implementing this process more prominently than other factors, and believe that by cultivating the architects’ mind and genuinely encouraging their geographical and cultural sensitivities, we can hope to expect that the ultimate architectural product—while enjoying pure creativity—expresses manifestations of a careful attention for spatial–temporal features in the most appropriate form. This approach accentuates the architects’ role in paying attention to global ideas and their ability to apply architectural grammar and principles (albeit in line with the school of modernism).

In the context of re-reading cultural globalization—given the role and nature of geography—it is easy to understand why in traditional societies and before the prevalence of the globalization process, the identity crisis in architecture was of significant importance. The localization of architecture as a cultural product in traditional societies could be well understood by examining the relationship between “place” and “space” in such societies. By transforming the realm of space into a modern subject, the proliferation of countless identical spaces representing Euclidean geometry and modern abstract thinking—without motivation and originality of experience—space is rushing toward place lessness over time. In reality, what led modernist architecture to this unification is a lack of concern for these spatial differences. Since modern architecture had negated the geographical and historiographical boundaries, it can be concluded that from the perspective of the modernist architecture movement, history and geography, just as the main conditions of human culture, do not have a significant impact on the development of architecture, compared to technological innovations and visual expressiveness. The abstraction and uniqueness of modern architecture is at odds with the ancient culture of architecture, which originates from the historical development of its elements in a specific geographical context.

Regionalism is a form of architecture occurring in the place, and is a way of constructing space, sensitive to specific climatic and geographical conditions, or in other words (Popescu 2006): an architectural response to geography, rewritten in different manifestations of regionalism. He considers the late nineteenth-century regionalist architecture to be very much influenced by human geography. Meanwhile, he believes that the innovative movement in geography has sizably contributed to the creation of critical regionalism. It can be argued that in order to present regionalist architecture, a geographical understanding and appreciation of the qualities of the supposed space and its connection with socio-cultural activities are essential. These approaches can be traced back to the history of architecture. Therefore, Christine Norberg-Schultz asserts that the modernist movement neglects “memories and symbols,” and she therefore considers the need for regionalism to create a “place,” inevitable (Norberg-Schulz 2000, p. 8).

There is no critical regionalism without regions. While valuing the uniqueness of a place it maintains a high level of self-criticism, ushering in a new form of regionalist writing. It looks for the uniqueness of the site and location. Indeed, the main idea of regionalism was that an architect should engage with the specificities of culture, place, tectonics, and tactile experience, otherwise the built environment will only consist of functional entities. Frampton Proposes that critical regionalism mediate between universally accepted practice and the particularities of place and locality. Although in a fact-finding manner, it can be claimed that the rescue of architecture is latent within the region and regionalism concepts in geography and it allows reflecting on some of the key contemporary debates of “critical regionalism.” It would seem necessary to focus on the different cultural, environmental, and geographical characteristics that influence the theory and practice of regionalist architecture. It is about how these characteristics contributed and are contributing to generating a portfolio of critical regionalism. These geographical characteristics between the problems of global and local can certainly help in one of the main challenges for

revival of architectural debate in the contemporary era, which is to seek new forms of “regionalist architecture” as defined by Lewis Mumford and then by Frampton, Tzonis, and Lefaivre.

Here, critical regionalism can be summarized not necessarily as a style, but as a process of attraction and an important discourse that determines historical and geographical features. Emphasizing the specific features of a site, its climatic conditions, geographical location, environmental context and its local cultural background—expressed through unique structural combinations along with the use of contemporary architectural language—can reinforce regional identity and location. What is witnessed is that the critical regionalist approach has a strong tendency to understand identity, local culture, and geography, a concept non-existent in the dominant and globalized style of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Regionalism seems to be the only way out of an international and global style of architecture. This concept has made architects prioritize the creation of place. Perhaps the most powerful story here is the narrative of how geographical aspects make it possible to trigger critical regionalism as a powerful paradigm in the contemporary architecture.

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