An Evaluation of Regionalism in Architectural History

Mimarlık Tarihinde Yöreselcilik Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme

ABSTRACT

Region as a notion in architecture has its roots in antiquity. However, it began to be widely used when Postmodernism was regarded as the counterpart of Modernism. Unlike Modernism, the regionalist approach primarily revolves around including regional features in design and is opposed to standardization, focusing on society, identity, and place. In time, different movements such as Critical Regionalism and Vernacular Regionalism have also emerged with their distinctive discourses. This essay aims to investigate Regionalism in architectural history regarding its definition, ancient background, and how it is related to the concepts of modernity, identity, society, and place, referring to Critical Regionalism and Vernacular Modernism.

Keywords: Regionalism, Critical Regionalism, Vernacular Regionalism, Identity, Society, Place

ÖZET

Mimarlıkta bir kavram olarak bölgenin kökleri antik çağlara dayanmaktadır. Ancak, bu terim Postmodernizmin Modernizmin karşılığı olarak kabul edilmesiyle yaygın olarak kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Modernizm'den farklı olarak bölgeselci yaklaşım öncelikle bölgesel özelliklerin tasarıma dahil edilmesine dayanır ve standardizasyona karşı çıkarak topluma, kimliğe ve yere odaklanır. Zaman içerisinde Eleştirel Bölgeselcilik ve Yerel Bölgeselcilik gibi farklı hareketler de kendine özgü söylemleriyle ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu makale, Eleştirel Bölgeselcilik ve Yerel Modernizm'e atıfta bulunarak, mimarlık tarihinde Bölgeselciliğin tanımı, antik arka planı ve modernite, kimlik, toplum ve yer kavramlarıyla nasıl ilişkili olduğunu incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yöreselcilik, Eleştirel Bölgeselcilik, Yerel Bölgeselcilik, Kimlik, Toplum, Yer

Pınar Kutluay [1]

INTRODUCTION

Although the idea of region in architecture can be traced back to antiquity, Regionalism as a term gained popularity when it began to be considered a negative reaction to the international style of Modernism replaced by Postmodernism towards the middle of the 20th century. Since the 1970s and 1980s, it has been an active topic of architectural debates that involved the dualities of old and new, past and present, and regional and universal.

The regionalist approach in architecture promotes integrating regional qualities such as geography, climate, available building materials, and construction techniques into the design, while it is against standardization, a fundamental feature of Modernism. It also focuses on the sociocultural conditions of a particular region and considers them decisive. From this perspective, the building becomes a common product of that society and region. This also shows the capacity of a building to reflect a unique identity in its place. Regarding its position towards modernism and how it handles the concepts of society, identity, and place, Regionalism has received various criticisms, and its different interpretations have emerged, such as Critical Regionalism and Vernacular Modernism. This essay explores Regionalism in architectural history in terms of its definition, ancient background, and how it revolves around the concepts of modernity, identity, society, and place, with reference to Critical Regionalism and Vernacular Modernism.

UNDERSTANDING REGIONALISM IN ARCHITECTURE IN TERMS OF MODERNITY, IDENTITY, SOCIETY AND PLACE

About region, Raymond Williams (1995) writes that it became a subordinate part of a larger political entity during the nation-states in the 19th century. Therefore, this usage paved the way for its being associated with the distinction between dominance and subordination. Williams notes that region can mean provincial or suburban as well, however; it can also have a positive meaning via the use of ''regionalism.'' For him, regionalism implies a distinctive way of life, especially in architecture and cooking (Williams, 1995). Regionalism came to architecture from the political and social sciences at the beginning of the 20th century, and it is different from *regional* architecture (Erkılıç, 1998). Architecturally speaking, it refers to the discourse that deals with design regarding

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[1] Assist. Prof. Dr., Kütahya Dumlupınar University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Kütahya, Türkiye. ORCID: 0000-0001-7664-8530

particularity and locale, advocating the view that local experiences should constitute the basis of design (Canizaro, 2007). It is usually employed to analyze and understand tensions such as between globalization and localism, modernity, and tradition.

Since the Renaissance, Regionalism has been used to formulate arguments both to support and oppose various historical movements such as Romanticism, Eclecticism, Revivalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. However, the idea of region regarding natural and political aspects dates back to antiquity. Its oldest origins can be found in the Persian road system, the Hellenic model of government, and later Roman imperial practices of territorial management (Canizaro, 2007). For Romans, regionalization was both a network of roads that connected their cities, the ones in the center and practice of governance where locals could maintain some of their traditions as long as they stayed loyal to the capital city and paid their taxes (Kostof, 1985). A specific regionalism for architecture has been pointed out by Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, which was the regionalism of Vitruvius (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 1991). The question of regional architecture based on natural and political aspects first emerged probably in Vitruvius's *De Architectura* (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2012). In this treatise, Vitruvius provides a guide on how to design buildings and elaborates on the natural relations between the qualities of a place and the health of its residents (Canizaro, 2007). Despite its ancient roots, Regionalism as a modern idea has emerged through the criticisms of Modernism between the 1940s and 1960s, reaching its peak (Erkılıç, 1998).

In understanding Modernism, modernity, modernization, and identity also play a significant role. Identity can be defined as ''a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative'' (Hall, 1991). It should go through the other before it can construct itself. It is always temporary and consists of dynamic effects of relations that make identities via differences (Grossberg, 1996). Therefore, there is a multiplicity of identities and differences rather than one (Marcer, 1992). In society, everyone is unique; however, she or he shares a kind of identity with another or a group. Identities are constructed within; therefore, they should be analyzed and understood in their historical and institutional contexts (Hall, 1991). The architectural identity of a region can also be constructed based on how the local architecture differs regarding materials and construction.

Regions are constructed of places that can be analyzed based on location, sense of place, and locale (Agnew, 1987). Firstly, being locations, places can be regarded as a geographic area surrounded by political and economic boundaries. Secondly, there is also a sense of place about the feeling of being in a particular place. This sensation refers to the character and quality of life. And thirdly, locale defines place as the setting where social relations are formed and refers to the institutional scale of living and architecture, such as the neighborhood, the public square, and the city (Moore, 2001). With Modernism, the way places are perceived has changed. For the Modernists, the traditional concept of place has lost its value as modern social science has a vague interpretation of the distinction between place and community. For an individual, becoming modern includes breaking links to place in terms of work, recreation, and sense of identity and acquiring the feeling of placeless (Agnew, 1987). This feeling can be like how buildings are built by neglecting regional differences for the sake of Modernism. Regarding standardization, which makes them placeless, they can be located almost everywhere in the world (Frampton, 2007). The regionalist movement underlines the potential problems in this view. It suggests including the features that belong to that place, such as geography, climate, available building materials, and construction techniques in the design.

INTERPRETATION AND CRITICISM OF REGIONALISM

Revolving around modernity, identity, society, and place, Regionalism can be interpreted and criticized from various architectural perspectives. The dualities in theory offer different positions and have led to discussions together with the emergence of Critical Regionalism and Vernacular Modernism.

Regionalism, particularly architectural regionalism, involves three important dualities: resistance and response, imitation and invention, and tradition and modernity. Resistance and response have become the center of regionalist discussions in the 20th century for many scholars, including Lewis Mumford and Kenneth Frampton. Regionalist resistance can be based on politics or representation and aims to maintain personal or local identity through forms. For modern resistance, the tradition continues; however, rather than a pope or a king, the leading force becomes the changing structure of society with the industrialization, modern technology, and globalization. These factors decreased the relation to place, the use of local material, and the creation of social connections, and the response that appears against resistance. It aims at fulfilling local needs to minimize the impact of such forces. However, in normative regional practice, the architect can ignore social or political issues and only focus on climate, topography, and available materials. The dialectic between imitation and invention is also important. Imitation refers to providing cultural continuity; therefore, it is crucial to keep traditions while integrating inventions into design. And, the dialectic of tradition and modernity refers to the core of the regionalist discourse. It

points out the conflict between cultural continuity and the wish for progress together with innovation (Canizaro, 2007). Paul Ricoeur (2007) writes that ''every culture cannot sustain and absorb the shock of modern civilization. There is the paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization.'' To be modern and to be able to maintain traditions at the same time is one of the leading issues of Regionalism, and Critical Regionalism emerged as a response to this.

Critical Regionalism was first used by Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, and in the early 1980s and later, Kenneth Frampton elaborated on it. Keith L. Eggener (2002) notes that Lefaivre and Tzonis identified an architecture that shares the geographical and cultural aspects of its location. Critical regionalist approach was described to avoid the placeless of Modernism and historicism of Postmodernism. For Frampton, ''the fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place.'' It serves as a form of resistance and reaction to universal standardizations. However, Critical Regionalism is problematic as an intellectual construct. It is a formation that refers to an architecture that is fed by locality, usually under the impact of outside and positions of authority (Eggener, 2002).

The roots of Critical Regionalism are also in antiquity, exemplified by Vitruvius's focus on geography. Later, the Romantic Regionalism and Nationalist Romanticism emerged based on the same concerns regarding culture and geography. This kind of regionalism was criticized by Lewis Mumford in *The South in Architecture* (1941) (Eggener, 2002). Mumford writes that culture and identity were vaguer as conceptions than the romanticists and nationalists assumed, and that must have shaped their architectural approach. For him, regionalism ''is not a matter of using the most available local material, or of copying some simple form of construction what our ancestors used, for want of anything better, a century or two ago. Regional forms are those that closely meet the actual conditions of life and most fully succeed in making a people feel at home environment: they do not merely utilize the soil, but they reflect the current conditions of culture in the region'' (Mumford, 1941) Lefaivre and Tzonis wrote about the same issue and used the term Critical Regionalism for the first time (Eggener, 2002).

Lefaivre & Tzonis (2003) explain how they came up with Critical Regionalism. They state that they aimed to make others interested in the approach of several architects who were looking for alternatives to Postmodernism. For them, most postmodernist buildings did not look much different from their predecessors. They were not using the term regionalism directly, it was their choice to use it for analysis purposes. They declare that they decided to combine the Kantian concept ''critical'' with Regionalism to make the arguments more sophisticated and indicate differences between this new stylistic approach in architecture from its previous uses that were sentimental, prejudiced, and irrational. For them, the widely-known concept of regionalism gave priority to the particular characters of the regions and tended to ignore the modern design approaches. In other words, they wanted to name this new style that they regarded as an alternative to Regionalism. Gevork Hartoonian (2006) argues that their usage critical is problematic, and there are two important changes between their writings. The first change is related to the use of the concept of critical. In 1996, Alan Colquhoun criticized how they used the concept of critical for their argument on regionalism in the essay from 1981. He questioned the necessity of adding the ''critical.'' For him, Lefaivre and Tzonis give two meanings to critical when they describe Critical Regionalism and they focus on resistance. However, since there is already a tendency to associate regionalism with Kultur in opposition to Zivilization, it does not make much sense to name it as critical. The second meaning that Lefaivre and Tzonis use refers to avoiding nostalgia by removing regional elements. Therefore, these two usages of meanings contradict each other (Colquhoun, 2007).

The second change that Hartoonian mentions is how they interpret Frampton's ideas. Frampton (1985) writes that Critical Regionalism is based on a resistance that aims to mediate the effect of universal civilization and be a means for reflecting the limited constituencies and serving them. Furthermore, ''Critical Regionalism is a dialectical expression.'' For him, it aims to break Modernism down regarding local values and images. In his view, Critical Regionalism aims to find alternative design solutions based on Modernist ideas that are adjusted to the existing regional design approaches, in a way resisting them. Frampton also notes that Critical Regionalism is a powerful means of resistance (Frampton, 1983). However, he also writes that it is a method or process rather than a product that could vary depending on individual aspects (Frampton, 1985). This dependence on individualism tends to reduce the validity of the term. Such critiques of Critical Regionalism show that even though it is assumed to resist Modernism, it also has attempted to achieve a compromise between modern and traditional. With the same aim, different interpretations and critiques have continued to emerge in the discourse, and Vernacular Modernism is one of them.

In *Vernacular Modernism: Heimat, Globalization and the Built Environment* (2005), Maiken Umbach and Bernd Hüppauf write about modernity and the notion of vernacular in relation to each other. Unlike modernity, the

meaning of vernacular is not universal. It refers to ''an extremely wide variety of practices and meanings, ranging from the native language or dialect of minority groups to the artifacts of everyday popular culture.'' They write that the concept of vernacular, which can be used in the regionalist context, has gained importance as vernacular cultures are developing in our world. They also state that in recent decades there has been a rise of local and regional identity politics in the West; however, there have been other changes that confused the theorists as well. In their view, this shows that the vernacular itself is one of the generative principles of modernity, and they call it ''Vernacular Modernism.'' As a result of Modernism, architects created it to complete the missing parts of the International Style (Umbach & Hüppauf, 2005).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, dating back to antiquity, Regionalism in architectural history revolves around modernity, identity, society, and place after the rise of Modernism. It is important to realize that classical architecture, which contributed to modern architecture, also played a role in developing the regionalist idea. Furthermore, as the way the complex notions of modernity, identity, society, and place are understood change, Regionalism acquires different meanings.

Different interpretations and critiques of regionalism have emerged depending on how it has been perceived, mostly regarding the dualities of resistance and response, imitation and invention, and tradition and modernity. In this case, Critical Regionalism has become one of the leading notions. It has constituted its own discourse in the discourse of Regionalism. Critical thinking in the regionalist approach also has paved the way for other interpretations and criticisms of the related concepts. For instance, Vernacular Modernism questions the notion of vernacular in relation to Modernism.

With the rise of globalization and changing sociocultural conditions, Regionalism in architecture now has a bigger potential to be explored and analyzed as an approach. Therefore, similar to what Riceour pointed out, one of the most important dilemmas in this case is how to be able to adjust to what modern is while keeping what traditional is.

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