

## **THE POTENTIAL OF ARCHITECTURE IN THE FORMATION OF REGIONAL IDENTITY: FROM STIMULUS TO REACTION**

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**Abstract.** Turning points in history, major socio-political cataclysms stimulate the formation of new identities in society - national, social and cultural. Under these conditions, architecture receives a special impetus: it is being transformed in accordance with the new needs of the state and citizens. Using examples from the practice of post-Soviet and other countries, the article shows that the regional character in modern architecture can be expressed by: creating artistic images using the attributive features of local architecture, i.e. manifest itself in the form of historical tradition; creation of architectural objects as new phenomena, previously uncharacteristic for a given city or country. Despite the fact that globalization has penetrated into all spheres of life, most people in the world identify themselves not with the planet or continent, but with the region where they were born and live. Architecture creates visual images that support the processes of self-identification of citizens. The motives (stimulus) for the search for identity are political, socio-economic, cultural, technological "triggers" (change of economic formations, recovery after wars, occupation of territories, etc.) of the modern world. The reaction to such processes in architecture is manifested in the form of a transformation of the "language" of shaping, the search for representative images of buildings and structures.

**Keywords:** architecture, regional architecture, regional identity

**Introduction.** The paternalism of the Soviet government, which was expressed in the state regulation of architecture in 1/6 of the globe, since the early 1990s in the independent post-Soviet countries has been replaced by a desire for regional originality. In the former Soviet republics, since 1991, the search for techniques and methods for improving architecture has become especially acute due to the formation of young states that are looking for their own roots and striving to create their own unique image in the international arena. The main changes took place in the expression of the artistic image of architecture: a wide range of means was used - from elements of traditional architecture to the compilation of global "themes" (Abdrassilova and Danibekova, 2021).

The past three decades on the territory of the post-Soviet countries are full of examples of architectural articulation of the ideas of identity, but the regionalization of architecture is a long process that requires relevant techniques and methods that are appropriate in specific situations. The successful formation of regional identity occurs through the organic refraction of traditions and global trends, taking into account the context of the place. The study and analysis of local natural, historical, cultural and economic specifics contribute to the understanding of the traditions of regional cultures and the methodological use of their qualities that are not visible to a superficial glance, "about respect for human originality ..." (Asskarov, 1986, p.67).

The socio-economic development of countries motivates the activation of local features, especially in the architecture of public buildings (museums, theaters, sports facilities, etc.), which are key elements of the spatial environment: it is these objects that actively respond to the cultural demands of society and most clearly express the existing context. The architectural image of these objects, created taking into account ethnic, historical, building traditions and modern technological innovations, provides a link between society and cultural memory. This awakens in the population a sense of belonging to history, and contributes to its self-identification.

The great advantage of the post-Soviet countries is the presence of a powerful scientific and practical base of architecture and construction of the Soviet period, provided by the state planned economy, which, however, was distinguished by the universality of approaches to the conditions of various regions of the Soviet Union. After a period of collapse caused by the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, the former Soviet republics began an independent path in architecture, inspired by their own history, culture and traditions. The range of "motives of inspiration" in shaping was wide: from imitation of the classics to avant-garde, supported by regional originality.

However, post-Soviet countries are integrating into international processes, and architecture is strongly influenced by global trends.

**Research methods.** In the process of research, on the basis of literary and graphic sources, an analysis of modern architectural practice in different countries was carried out, indicating an increase in interest in regional culture. We have compared large public buildings of the Soviet period, which adequately formed the architectural appearance of the cities of Kazakhstan, with post-Soviet objects with a similar functional purpose. In comparing the two periods, the features of the formative language of architecture were revealed. In the Soviet period, the politicization of all aspects of life, including architecture, influenced the image of public buildings - traditionally solemn, with the use of standard methods and elements of construction. Only some unique objects received architectural design using national motifs: domes, pylons, ornamental lattices and stained-glass windows, decor, stylized stalactites were "replicas" of regional building techniques (Abdrasilova and Danibekova, 2021).

**Results and discussion.** The study of the experience of Kazakhstan shows that socio-economic and cultural-historical changes have become incentives for the transformation of architecture at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries. Comparison of the architecture of Kazakhstan in the Soviet and post-Soviet period demonstrates clear changes in this area that occurred in connection with economic and technological innovations and led to typological and artistic transformations:

- economic changes occurred as a result of a change in the socio-economic foundations of the state;
- technological innovations became possible due to the inclusion of Kazakhstan in international processes, the construction of a new capital of the country;
- typological transformations are associated with a change in the structure of supply and demand for various services, an increase in the material and financial capabilities of the population;
- artistic and figurative transformations are connected with the self-identification of citizens in the conditions of an independent state, creative searches for means of expressing regional features in architecture. Almost all large modern objects use unique ways to express their regional affiliation through marking features (graphic, plastic or three-dimensional decorative elements, building forms) as allusions to local architecture (Abdrasilova and Danibekova, 2021, c.74-75).

In the context of global trends, the architectural reaction, stimulated by the processes of self-identification, can manifest itself in different forms:

- the first situation is the creation of artistic images in the form of historical tradition: the use of attributive features of local architecture;
- the second situation is the creation of architectural objects as new phenomena, previously uncharacteristic for a given city or country.

The first situation - attributive practice - is used quite widely and is easily "deciphered" by the consumer. An example of this practice is the largest multifunctional tourist complex in Central Asia "Keruen-saray" with an area of 20.5 hectares, commissioned in 2021 in the city of Turkestan (Kazakhstan). The Turkestan Reconstruction Project has harmoniously transformed the area around the unique masterpiece of architecture - the Mausoleum of Khoja Akhmet Yassavi (XIV century), which is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The mausoleum is the dominant urban environment of Turkestan, to which all planning axes are oriented, dictates the scale and style of the artistic image to the new architecture (Abdrasilova et al., 2021). "Keruen-Saray", which includes a hotel, restaurants, souvenir shops, a modern cinema, walking areas, canals, is inscribed in the existing urban development and reproduces the attributes of the architecture of a 1500-year-old city at a new technological level. The artistic image of the buildings of the complex gives rise to allusions with ancient eastern cities: domes, arched openings, openwork "panjara", other shades of the walls. The buildings of the complex are interconnected by a network of channels (Fig. 1, 2). In such examples, we observe the manifestation of a straightforward, "attributive" identity, in familiar images and details.



**Figure 1.** Tourist complex "Keruen-saray", Turkestan, Kazakhstan (Abdrasilova et al., 2021)



**Figure 2.** City of Turkestan: elements of urban design in the regional style.  
In the background is the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (Abdrasilova et al., 2021)

In the second situation, the regionalism of the content and form of architecture is manifested indirectly, through symbolization, metaphors, referring to the local culture and traditions. Creative searches receive a new impetus, architects are working to identify the origins of non-material and material culture and their interpretation in modern forms.

It is possible that foreign architects cannot always accurately interpret local sources. In 2010, in Astana, according to the project of the famous Italian architect Manfredi Nicoletti, the Central Concert Hall "Kazakhstan" was built (Fig. 3), the artistic image of which was inspired by the authors of such a natural phenomenon as the "desert rose". Despite the fact that almost 44% of the territory of Kazakhstan is occupied by deserts, they differ from the deserts of the Sahara, where "desert roses" are common - mineral aggregates formed by characteristic lenticular crystals (rosettes) resembling rose petals. This kind of gypsum crystallizes in the sands of the desert after precipitation, and takes on bizarre shapes. For Kazakhstan, tulips, poppies, other steppe and desert plants are endemic, but not "roses". Noting the uniqueness and quality of the technological solutions of the concert hall "Kazakhstan", it must be admitted that its artistic image was not identified in accordance with the local context, and "... ordinary residents of the capital" gave the building the offensive nickname "cabbage" (Moiser, 2017, p. 120).



**Figure 3.** Central Concert Hall "Kazakhstan". Studio Nicoletti Associati (Moiser, 2017, p.120)

A completely different form was given to the image of the “desert rose” in the Qatar Architectural Museum of Architecture, built in 2019 in Doha by the project of the architect Jean Nouvel (Fig. 3). In this object, an innovative material is used in the construction of the museum, creating an analogy with the petals of a “desert rose”, appropriately personifies the nature of this country and requires a regional narrative. Round disks of the architecture of the National Museum of Qatar, wrapping themselves under flat surfaces rich in light and shade spaces and hiding from private foreign ships.

([https://architime.ru/news/nuvel/national\\_museum\\_qatar.htm#1.jpg](https://architime.ru/news/nuvel/national_museum_qatar.htm#1.jpg)).



**Figure 4.** National Museum of Qatar. Architect Jean Nouvel  
([https://architime.ru/news/nuvel/national\\_museum\\_qatar.htm#1.jpg](https://architime.ru/news/nuvel/national_museum_qatar.htm#1.jpg))

The migration of architectural ideas in the context of globalization contributes to the "adaptation" of the language of the local cultural context to the "visualization methods" of innovative technologies. What is new

is the creation in different parts of the world of unique objects with architecture that was previously uncharacteristic for this country: regional identity is manifested in architectural structures, whose artistic image is associated not with national elements, but with symbols - visual (new understanding of decor) or spiritual (tales, myths). and etc.). A distinctive feature of such unique objects (the Louvre branch and the Al-Bahar complex in Abu Dhabi (UAE), the mosque in Doha (Qatar), the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Astana, etc.) is the mutual interweaving of traditional "attribute" images of architecture with the latest technologies. In this case, the architectural identity is declared at the highest technological level, being the driver of innovative processes in the country's economy.

One of the most famous projects that have formed a new identity in the regional environment is the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, which in 2014 was awarded the prestigious architecture award of the London Design Museum and named "Project of the Year". The legendary Zaha Hadid considered this object, designed in 2007, as one of her main projects, intending to "... give this historical understanding of architecture a new impetus and create a new identity based on tradition", the continuity of calligraphic and ornamental patterns inherent in Islamic architecture.

([https://www.architime.ru/specarch/zaha\\_hadid\\_architects\\_ha/heydar\\_aliyev\\_center.htm#1.jpg](https://www.architime.ru/specarch/zaha_hadid_architects_ha/heydar_aliyev_center.htm#1.jpg))

The Heydar Aliyev Center is an example of the virtuoso use of innovative properties of materials in architecture (Fig. 5). The powerful plasticity of the form flowing from the facades to the roof, the refined whiteness of the surfaces, the terraced surrounding landscape create a solemn "sound" of forms, generating a new context of the environment. The resonance produced in the world by the architecture of the Heydar Aliyev Center puts this object on the level of global examples of a new identity. Despite the veiled "iconic", visual connection with the rich local architectural tradition, the Heydar Aliyev Center has become an integral element of the image of modern Baku.



**Figure 5.** Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center, Baku, Azerbaijan. Architect Zaha Hadid  
([https://www.architime.ru/specarch/zaha\\_hadid\\_architects\\_ha/heydar\\_aliyev\\_center.htm#1.jpg](https://www.architime.ru/specarch/zaha_hadid_architects_ha/heydar_aliyev_center.htm#1.jpg))

The headquarters of BEEAH Group in Sharjah (UAE, designed by Zaha Hadid Architects) was opened on March 30, 2022 BEEAH Headquarters / Zaha Hadid Architects.

([https://www.archdaily.com/979479/beeha-headquarters-zaha-hadid-architects?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Notifications&utm\\_campaign=daily&kth=6134695](https://www.archdaily.com/979479/beeha-headquarters-zaha-hadid-architects?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Notifications&utm_campaign=daily&kth=6134695)).

The building is equipped with LEED Platinum technology to achieve zero emissions and minimal energy consumption. Bringing to life the technologies of sustainable development and digitalization of processes, the headquarters represents a model of the "smart architecture" of the future. Fiberglass reinforced panels protect from excess sunlight; the cooling system of plates and glass regulates the temperature of the premises, creating comfortable conditions; local system filters wastewater; the solar farm charges Tesla batteries to power the building day and night. The intelligent building management system automatically controls the solution of everyday tasks: the work of a virtual concierge, intelligent conference rooms, remote and hybrid work systems; adjusts lighting and temperature according to occupancy and time of day.



**Figure 6.** BEEAH Group headquarters, Sharjah, UAE. Project Zaha Hadid Architects ([https://www.archdaily.com/979479/beeha-headquarters-zaha-hadid-architects?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Notifications&utm\\_campaign=daily&kth=6134695](https://www.archdaily.com/979479/beeha-headquarters-zaha-hadid-architects?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Notifications&utm_campaign=daily&kth=6134695))

But not only the technological "stuffing" of the building, but also the architecture responds to the environment, optimizing local climatic conditions: the shape of the building is "embedded" in the surrounding landscape of the Al-Sajja desert, which is shaped by the prevailing winds in the form of a rhythm of concave-convex sand dunes. All interior spaces are provided with ample daylight, while a limited amount of glazing saves from the scorching desert sun. The two main "dunes" house administrative and public spaces, which are connected by a central oasis courtyard, an important part of the complex's natural ventilation strategy.

Despite the innovativeness of technological solutions, the headquarters of the BEEAH Group does not look like an alien object in these desert areas with an ancient nomadic culture: the openwork pattern of the geometrized decor of the panels, the "fluidity of forms", characteristic of Islamic architecture, provide a "conflict-free" connection of the building with the local context, culture, traditions.

The considered examples of unique architectural structures with a pronounced regional identity (identity) demonstrate the result of the process: the path from stimulus to reaction.

The incentive (reason) for the manifestation of identity is the need to express the national, cultural, historical characteristics of peoples, communities, countries.

The reaction to the public need is manifested in architecture that expresses local identity in modern conditions: in the form of a historical tradition or in the form of new phenomena that were previously uncharacteristic for a given country; artistic images and architectural and planning solutions for structures, taking into account the natural-climatic, historical-cultural, social context, modern construction technologies and world experience.

The role of architecture in the formation of regional identity can hardly be overestimated - the mechanism for the formation and development of the latter is a mutual process: self-identification of citizens launches the identification mechanism in architecture; and architecture, being formed in new conditions, begins to influence the cultural development of the nation.

**Conclusion.** The article (unintentionally) considers objects in countries associated with Eastern culture. Perhaps such a selection of material is explained by a more pronounced iconic visualization of the theme of self-identification in the architecture of countries that are acquiring a new international image in the 21st century.

Using examples from the practice of post-Soviet and other countries, it is shown that the potential of architecture in the formation of regional identity is stimulated by major socio-political events. The motives for the search for identity can be political, socio-economic, cultural, technological "triggers": a change in economic formations, recovery after wars, occupation of territories, etc.

In architecture, the reaction to such processes is manifested in the form of a new “language” of shaping, representative images of buildings and structures:

- artistic images in architecture are manifested in the form of historical tradition: they use attributive features of local architecture;
- architectural objects are created as new phenomena that create a modern image of a city or country through innovative forms.

The mutual integration of economies and cultures leads to the fact that the role of regional identity in the development of modern architecture is expressed not only in ensuring the continuity of the traditions of shaping, but also in shaping the image of a modern state based on scientific and technological progress in the international arena.

Architecture plays an important role in visual images, which are a kind of "icons" of citizens' self-identification. Despite the fact that globalization has penetrated into all spheres of life, most people in the world still prefer to identify themselves not with the planet or continent, but with the country, region or locality where they were born and live.

Global architecture penetrates the regional system and contributes to the understanding of traditional values, the expression of regional identity. The process of interpenetration of global and local in architecture cannot be stopped. But there is an opportunity to maintain a balance between “local features” and “innovated innovations”. And for this it is necessary to understand the relationship of incentives (as a stimulus) and reactions (as a response) in the formation of modern architecture.

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