Chapter 2: REGIONALISM AND IDENTITY
2.1.0 Regionalism

2.1.1 What is regionalism?

Regionalism as defined by Wikipedia, may take many definitions according to the field of use. Regionalism as an art refers to an American realist modern art movement that was popular during the 1930s. In international relations, regionalism may refer to the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose combined with the creation and implementation of institutions that express a particular identity and shape collective action within a geographical region. Likewise, in politics, regionalism is referred to a political ideology that focuses on the interests of a particular region or group of regions, whether traditional or formal.

We commonly talk about critical regionalism, in architecture, which is an approach that strives to counter placelessness and lack of identity in modern architecture by using the building’s geographical context.

According to Prof. Chris Abel in his article, “Regional Transformation” in the Architectural Review 1077 November, 1986: Anatomy of Regionalism; he suggests that regionalism attempts to put back into architecture what modernism conspicuously took out, namely continuity in a given place between past and present forms of building. He further suggests that regional architecture has almost always accepted imported models and that it is the transformation of model and type that the specific nature of regionalism can be discovered.

It is in countries of 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. For the inhabitants of these countries, the business of deciding what does or does not belong in their region, acquires political and emotional dimensions that smack of a basic struggle for cultural survival, frequently couched in the plaintive term of a “search for identity”

The regionalist approach is now seen to be one of the few potential ways of making architecture with a human face. It permits architects to relate to the past in a deeper and more authentic way than Post-Modern Classism can ever

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\(^1\) Architectural Review 1077 November, 1986: Anatomy of Regionalism; page 37
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attempt. It allows modernism to be built on humanely by injecting a sense of place and continuity without throwing away the spatial and industrial advantages that Modernism offered.²

2.1.2 Cross-cultural Effects

Contrary to the images, such architecture is not always local in its origins and may derive, wholly or in part, from other sources. For instance, where truly indigenous examples are found, as in the mud brick architecture of the central Nejd area of the Arabia Peninsula, they are the outcome of relatively isolated situations.¹ As illustrated in fig 2-3 to fig 2-5.

The aims and methods of regionalists are further complicated if it is acknowledged that even the most powerful forms of monumental architecture may be adapted to different conditions of place and culture. For example, the Pantheon in Rome with its countless progeny and their regional variations. Likewise, the Swahili architecture of the East African Coast originated from the Arab world and has transformed to suit the local climate and culture. See fig 2-6 and fig 2-7.

For both monumental and non-monumental architecture generally, the crucial measure of historical import is not the individual work taken separately, but the whole linked series of precedents and later variants with all their transformations over time, each of which in turn becomes an actual or potential model which can beget still more transformations. Replications of the model provide essential elements of continuity through change by which cultures measure their lineage.

² Architectural Review 1077 November, 1986: Anatomy of Regionalism; page 37
¹ IBID
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2.2.0 Types of Architectural Regionalism

Architectural Regionalism has components within which one can outline numerous examples and discussions. There are three main categories of regionalism which have been developed.

i. Vernacular regionalism
ii. Modern regionalism
iii. Critical regionalism

2.2.1 Vernacular Regionalism

This is a category of architecture based on localized needs and construction materials, and reflecting local traditions. Vernacular architecture tends to evolve over time to reflect the environmental, cultural, technological, and historical context in which it exists. It has often been dismissed as crude and unrefined, but also has proponents who highlight its importance in current design.

This can be broken down with simple examples. For instance, igloos, Inca Cities, and traditional huts like the Zulu huts. They are influenced by their location in time and in space.

The Incas are Native South American people whose empire, based in Peru and covering the Andean region, lasted from the 12th century until the mid-16th century. The Incas were sophisticated engineers, architects, and artists who had a highly complex social structure. The descendants of the Incas form roughly half of today's population of Peru.

NOTE: The snow used to build an igloo must have enough structural strength to be cut and stacked appropriately. The igloos were of different sizes and the biggest ones could be used for community feasts and traditional dances.

Fig 2-8: Eskimo Igloo
Source: www.wikipedia.org

Fig 2-9: A section through Eskimo Igloo
Source: www.wikipedia.org

Fig 2-10: Machu Picchu
Source: www.rediscovermachupicchu.com

Fig 2-11: Machu Picchu
Source: www.rediscovermachupicchu.com

Fig 2-12: Hugh Thomson above the Cota Coca canyon
Source: www.thewhiterock.co.uk
Archaeologists have uncovered several impressive Inca cities from the ground and have cleared dense vegetation that has kept them hidden for many centuries. Among these cities are Vilcabamba, Cota Coca, Corihuayrachina, Choquequirao, Vitcos and of course, the magical Machu Picchu. The latter one being the most spectacular. Perhaps the most spectacular city on Earth! All of these were "lost" at some point. Like a needle in a haystack!

These cities were either raided and demolished by the Spaniards or abandoned by their population for unknown reasons. Some of them were known, but they were forgotten. Their location was forgotten, rather. The vast jungles of Peru can hide them so well, that even experienced explorers could walk away near them, without having any idea about what is there. Also, there are cities that were never found by the Spaniards. They were never discovered until the modern age like the Machu Picchu.
By mid-seventies, vernacular architecture distinguished itself as an important source where basic components of design such as climate, technology and related symbolism have existed and matured over the centuries of man’s involvement in architecture.

“Vernacular architecture does not go through fashion cycles. It is nearly immutable, indeed unimprovable, since it serves the purpose of perfection. As a rule, the origin of indigenous building forms and construction methods is lost in the distant past.”

In a very broad classification there are two approaches to vernacularism:

i. The conservative attitude
ii. The interpretative attitude

Both have in common the idea of bringing a new and contemporary existence to vernacular forms and spatial arrangement but differ in the way they treat community and technology.

a) Conservative Vernacularism

The architecture employed here is indifferent to the community; it has inherited traditional technology, local materials and the natural environment. The idea is to bring back to the vernacular mode, building tradition in danger of extinction. It should be noted that use of durable materials increase the acceptability of conservative vernacularism.

The most important contributor to conservative vernacularism was the late Hassan Fathy who devoted more than half a century of his professional life on his endeavour.

This kind of vernacularism has some shortcomings i.e.:

i. It has mostly been applied to residential houses. Hence, its application in other areas needs further development.
ii. It needs special skills in the choice and use of materials as

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5 M. Kimeu, Beyond Modernism, towards a regionalised architecture, University of Nairobi; 1993.
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“to fossil a tradition pattern in concrete and give it to a family which probably no longer has the same requirements as its predecessors seems to be preserving the wrong aspects of traditional architecture.”

b) Interpretative Vernacularism

This may be referred to as Neo-Vernacularism. It is an approach that has emerged to bring new life to vernacular heritage for new and contemporary functions. Its widest area of application being the architecture for tourism and culture, where technology which has nothing to do with those which existed regionally is utilized in order to bring about:

i. Modern comfort
ii. Ease of construction and maintenance and
iii. Modern infrastructure, heating, cooling and technical services

In these efforts more of a lip-service has been given to the regional components and therefore architecture has become more of an expression of local shapes and forms where culture is reduced to souvenir and folklore.

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2.2.2 Modern regionalism

Regionalism was a move in architecture rejecting sameness of internationalism but not modernism. This is true because modernism demands a respect for:

- inherent qualities of building materials,
- expressiveness of structure and
- functional justifications of forms that constitute buildings

This does not contradict much in essence with works of architects who wish to adopt a regional approach. To achieve the goals of regionalism of regionalism, modernism provides techniques to cope with problems and also offers a code of ethics and categories of aesthetics for use.

According to Suha Ozkan, there are two categories of modern regionalism:

1. Concrete modernism
2. Abstract modernism

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7 M. Kimeu, Beyond Modernism, towards a regionalised architecture, University of Nairobi; 1993.

8 Suha Ozkan: Regionalism within modernism (1985)
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a) Concrete modernism
This accommodates all approaches to regional expression which directly replicates features, fragments or entire buildings in the region combined with modern elements. These buildings when loaded with values of symbolic relevance become much more acceptable in their new form which is due to the values attached to the original built forms.

This type of regionalism is acknowledged by use of:

i. Contemporary materials and construction techniques
ii. Building qualities of the old which backs the new

It should be noted that post-modernism covers what is referred to as concrete regionalism

b) Abstract modernism
This involves abstracting elements from the past in order to derive building forms. It mainly incorporates the abstract qualities of a building, for example massing, solids and voids proportions, sense of place, use of light and structural principles in their reinterpreted form.

Abstraction also endeavours to bring back to existence the cultural issues by defining in terms of design elements the prevalent culture of the region concerned.

Examples of modern regionalism buildings include:

i. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) by architect Henning Larsen
ii. The Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi (Kenya)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) by architect Henning Larsen is a stately government building rooted in two Islamic architectural traditions, the vernacular as found in the local mud brick Najdi architecture, and the monumental as expressed in such works as the Alhambra and the Taj Mahal. Surrounded by villas and office buildings, it provides office space for 1'000 employees; meeting, conference and prayer rooms; banquet, library, auditorium, exhibition and parking facilities. The two semi-circular structures on either side of the main entrance house on the left the banquet hall, and on the right the library. The entrance leads to the four-storey triangular lobby. Each of the three main office areas centres upon an octagonal dome-covered plaza from which barrel-vaulted corridors (inspired by traditional city suqs) connect to the lobby. Within each office area are three formal gardens. Daylight reaches interiors far from the perimeter walls by means of these open to the sky spaces as
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well as by skylights. The degree of air conditioning needed has been reduced by thick walls, high quality insulation, mashrabiyyas and small windows. The jury noted that “simplicity and complexity are outstanding features of the design. This expensive building conveys a sense of economy and clarity”. Recipient of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1989.  

The Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi (Kenya) is connotatively, well known as the city’s landmark. It creates some unconscious satisfaction and a sense of ownership to the people, because it is a building which belongs into the context and the region at large. Its use of materials, texture, form and colour makes it belong; and gives it a great sense of placeness. For instance, The Amphitheatre relates to the African traditional house. Likewise, the use of the conical roof relates to majority of African traditional huts. The building uses materials and colour which look like mud (brown); and mud was commonly used as a walling material for most African houses. The colour is not repulsive. It gives you a feeling that this is good and not exactly borrowed from elsewhere. The building is an assemblage of geometry, but gives u a feeling of a circular form.

2.2.3 Critical regionalism

According to Wikipedia dictionary, Critical regionalism is an approach to architecture that strives to counter the placelessness and lack of meaning in Modern Architecture by using contextual forces to give a sense of place and meaning. (In the 1980s a few architects and theorists were disappointed with the direction that architecture was taking under the influence of postmodernism. 

Furthermore, according to A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, 2000 by James Stevens Curl, Critical Regionalism is defined as a strategy for achieving a more humane architecture in the face of universally held abstractions and international clichés. The term critical regionalism was first used by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre and later more famously and by Kenneth Frampton in Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points of an architecture of resistance.

“Critical Regionalism from a Desert Dweller's Perspective by Fred S. Matter

Fig 2.3: Säynatsalo Town Hall building by Alvar Aalto

“What makes a place unique is worth celebrating and protecting with architecture: finding and keeping the difference that makes a difference.”

Critical Regionalism from a Desert Dweller's Perspective by Fred S. Matter

9 AKTC
10 Wikipedia dictionary
According to Frampton, critical regionalism should adopt modern architecture critically for its universal progressive qualities but at the same time should value responses particular to the context. Emphasis should be on topography, climate, light, tectonic form rather than scenography and the tactile sense rather than the visual. He further argues that, architects should seek regional variations in their buildings instead of continuing to design in a style of global uniformity using ‘consumerist iconography masquerading as culture’, and should ‘mediate the impact’ of universal civilization with themes drawn indirectly from the individual ‘peculiarities of a particular place’. While appreciating the dangers of industrialization and technology, he did not advocate revivals of either the great historical styles or a humbler vernacular type of building. In essence, he sought the deconstruction of global Modernism, criticized post-Modernism for reducing architecture to a mere ‘communicative or instrumental sign’, and proposed the introduction of alien paradigms to the indigenous genius loci. He cited the work of Aalto and Utzon as offering examples of Critical Regionalism in which the local and the general were synthesized. Frampton cites the Säynätsalo Town Hall building by Alvar Aalto as a typical Critical Regionalist building.

As put forth by Tzonis and Lefaivre, critical regionalism need not directly draw from the context; rather elements can be stripped of their context and used in strange rather than familiar ways. Critical regionalism is different from regionalism which tries to achieve a one-to-one correspondence with vernacular architecture in a conscious way without consciously partaking in the universal. It seeks architectural traditions that are deeply rooted in the local conditions. This results in a highly intelligent and appropriate architecture. In its broadest sense, then, the Critical Regionalist sensibility looks to the uniqueness of site and location when deriving the formal aspects of any given project. Its influence can be felt in the work of the Tichino School in Switzerland, the sophisticated urban insertions of many contemporary Spanish architects (including Rafael Moneo), or the austere concrete forms of the Japanese master Tadao Ando. All point to a design method that is assuredly modern but relies on the organic unity of local material, climatic, and cultural characteristics to lend coherence to the finished work. The result is an architecture suited to light and touch.

The following architects have used such an approach in some of their works, just to mention a few: Alvar Aalto, Jørn Utzon, Studio Granda, Mario Botta, B.V.Doshi, Charles Correa, Alvaro Siza, Rafael Moneo, Geoffrey Bawa, Raj Rewal, Tadao Ando, Mack Scogin / Merrill Elam, Ken Yeang, William S.W. Lim, Tay Kheng Soon, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Tan Hock Beng. Some of their works are discussed later in this chapter and others, in chapter four.

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Note: the concrete forms

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2.3.0 Regionalism versus Globalization

Globalization widely denotes internationalization of economies, tastes, goods and services through international exchange, economic, developmental and governmental systems.\footnote{Birabi A. Kenneth & Nawangwe Barnabas, Globalization and Regionalism: Complement or Antagonistic Paradigms? The Case of Eastern Africa Architecture Ensembles Africa Habitat 6 (2012)} It goes beyond aspects of pop music, all manner of gadgetry, technology among others, and of late the most influential of these, is the power of the internet universalization and standardisation of lifestyles across the world. The latter is what Elaigwu (1995) calls..."CNNization of the world," coined from the global domination by Cable News Network (CNN). Further, according to Tomlinson (1991) and Said (1993) globalization, is a kind of cultural imperialism driven by the propensity to spread, infiltrate and superimpose foreign cultural values and habits onto a given place at the expense of local or regional heritage fabrics for the given place or region.

Meanwhile, regionalism is a progressive phenomenon characterised by main concepts of cultural production and identity and relations of geographical zoning or locality, in a sub-conscious attempt to reposition humanistic development most ideal for each given locality or region.\footnote{IBID} Thus, regionalism stands for culturally concentrated de-globalization that practically distances itself from a world of universalization. Further, regionalism can be described as a fostering of local craft coupled with response to local colours, materials and customs transforming them along their own unique development trajectories.
2.4.0 Regionalism and architectural identity

'Regionalism' is a slippery term and there is no clear consensus about its meaning, however, many authors have acknowledged that debates about regionalism in architecture are united by a common concern with the 'problem' of tradition. Citing the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Kenneth Frampton began his essay, 'Prospects for a Critical Regionalism', by identifying the resolution of tradition and modernity as the central paradox of our time. Advocates of regionalism promote the revival and reinterpretation of tradition as an oppositional strategy. For Frampton, regionalism offers "the sole possibility" of resisting the "universal Megalopolis", or that "ceaseless inundation of a place-less, alienating consumerism."\(^{15}\)

Lefaivre and Tzonis point to the writings of Lewis Mumford as the source for their concept of 'critical regionalism'. Mumford broke with earlier romantic or nationalist forms of regionalism by advocating an architecture that embraced local traditions while simultaneously engaging with the global, universalizing world. "With Mumford", Lefaivre maintains, "regionalism becomes a constant process of negotiation between the local and the global."\(^{16}\)

One of the key characteristics of regionalism is the way it attempts to revive and reinterpret local building traditions to achieve a synthesis with modern architectural forms. Curtis states, "at its best, regionalism penetrates to the generating principles and symbolic substructures of the past then transforms these into forms that are right for the changing social order of the present."\(^{4}\) For Buchanan, regionalism "must be a genuine hybrid, a totally new configuration which may include a remembrance of the past, but transformed or framed in terms of its significance for today."\(^{17}\)

Thus, people identify with buildings which may be abstracted or borrowed a lot from what they know. It could be what they eat, what they use to build, what they dress in or what is available all around them.

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2.5.0 Towards an authentic regionalism

According to William J.R Curtis in his article, titled, “Towards an Authentic Regionalism”, it would be misleading to speak of a monolithic regionalism operating in the world of architecture today since, by very definition, regionalism is committed to finding unique responses to particular places, cultures and climates. But there is certainly a mood gathering momentum which rejects the glib reproduction of international formulae and which seeks out continuities with local traditions. No doubts this reflects a spirit of increasing self-confidence in the Third World after colonial occupation, but is also part of a wider reaction against simplistic models of modernization.

At its worst it may degenerate into a skin-deep instant history in which ersatz images of the vernacular are combined with pastiches of national cultural stereotypes. At its best regionalism penetrates to the generating principles and symbolic substructures of the past then transforms these into forms that are right for the changing social order of the present. It is a matter of sensing beneath the surface the memories, myths, and aspirations that give a society coherence and energy, and then providing these with an authentic expression in architectural arrangement. The hope is to produce buildings of a certain timeless character that fuse old and new, regional and universal.18

Authentic regionalism stands out against all hackneyed and devalued versions of culture whether these stem from the international economic order, from nationalist propaganda or from Pan-Islamic clichés.

Regionalism looks for sustaining spiritual forces and refuses to accept that a tradition is a fixed set of devices and images. It sees the past as a series of superimposed layers of inventions from the earliest nomadic forms, through villages and towns, to later imperial and even colonial frameworks. It defines many of the most relevant patterns for dealing with climate, local materials and geography.

The present task is to keep the process moving: to find the right balance between local, national and international.

The grass root idea of culture is useful so long as it forces attention upon basic patterns of adaptation in the traditional architecture of a region (e.g. to climate) but misleading the moment that it ignores the role of exterior influences. Most vernaculars are hybrid of indigenous and imported types, and these types also change and adapt.

Regionalism is inevitably involved in the struggle between city and country, industry and handicraft, peasant values and the unrootedness of metropolis. Just as traditionalism is a reaction against loss of continuity, so regionalism is a restorative philosophy in favour of supposed rural harmony among people, their artifacts and nature.

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18 For the embryo of this critical positions see William J.R Curtis, Modern Architecture since 1900, Phaidon, Oxford 1982, chapter 25, ‘The problem of Regional Identity’ and 27, Modern Architecture and developing Countries since 1960.
2.6.0 Modernity, tradition and identity in the developing world

2.6.1 Techno utopia and identity


The modern movement enthusiastically aspired to create a universal culture. The new ‘Machines for living in’ set in ‘space, light and greenery’ were to emancipate their inhabitants from their bonds with the past, and cultivate a New Universal Man. Half a Century later, however, the techno-rationally biased and economy-obsessed buildings that have become only too familiar everywhere impair our sense of locality and identity. The standard building of today accelerates estrangement and alienation instead of integrating our world-view and sense of self. Simply, we have lost our faith in utopia.

Meanwhile, we have learned to admire unique and authentic forms of indigenous and vernacular traditions which were earlier hardly considered part of the realm of architecture. We admire the tangible integration of natural and material conditions, patterns of life and forms of building in traditional societies, and this gives us a strengthened sense of causality and existence.

The diversity of building in traditional societies is brought about the impact of local conditions and the specificity of culture. In our own culture the sheer force of industrial technology, combined with mobility, mass-communication and uniformity of lifestyle is causing entropy that minimalises diversity. What is the feasibility of regional culture and architecture in a world in which billions of people meet around tv-sets to watch the same football match? Are we not gradually becoming detached from our foothold in geographical and cultural soil and going to live in a fictitious and fabricated culture, the culture of simulacra that Umberto Eco has written about? Are we not moving towards a worldwide consumerist folklore, a mosaic impacts and information detached from their origin? Isn’t our culture doomed to lose all its authentic and turn into a planetary waxworks-show?

Snozzi, Luigi (1932–) A Swiss architect has designed many buildings in Switzerland, amongst them, Casa Heschl at Agarone; which testifies to his concern for the environment, his belief that there is nothing to invent, and that any destruction must be done intelligently with reference to the past.
2.6.2 Diversification versus unification

Beyond doubt, the gradual disappearance of a sense of locality and human message from our buildings is the result of cultural factors underlying the act of the building - the values and ways of thinking and action that govern our civilization.

Is it possible to alter the course of our culture? Is the resuscitation of regional architecture in post-industrial and Post-Modern society feasible? Indeed, can authentic architecture exist at all in the metaphysical materialism that we live in? Clearly, our identity, and mental well-being, cannot be supported by universally standardized and abstracted environment. Cultural anthropology has revealed that we do not live in separate physical and mental worlds. The two realms are totally fused and consequently, the organization of our physical world is a projection of the mental one and vice-versa. Architecture capable of supporting our identity has to be situationally, culturally and symbolically articulated.

The fundamental message of architecture is the very basic existential expression: how does it feel to be a human being in this world? And the task of architecture is to make us experience our existence with deeper significance and purpose. Architecture is to make us know and remember who we are. In the words of Aldo van Eyck: “Architecture must facilitate Man’s homecoming.”

Fig 2.44: Cultural diversification versus unification
Source: http://www.aartichapati.com/

Fig 2.45: The New Moon building in Dubai, is a symbolic architecture “accentuates the prosperity of present-day United Arab Emirates.”
Source: www.jasmine-v-world.blogspot.com

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Architecture capable of supporting our identity has to be situationally, culturally and symbolically articulated.

“Architecture must facilitate Man’s homecoming.”

Aldo van Eyck

Fig 2.46: The Canadian Museum of Civilization
Note the sweeping curves of the curatorial wing symbolize the rocky outcrops of the prehistoric landscape.
Source: © Canadian Museum of Civilization
2.6.3 Constituents of locality

What are the constituents of sense of specific locality? They are of course, reflections of natural, physical and social realities. They are expressions and experiences of specific nature, geography, landscape, local materials, skills and cultural patterns. But they are not detached elements; the qualities of culturally adapted architecture are inseparably integrated in tradition. Without continuity of an authentic tradition even a well-intentioned use of surface elements of regional character is doomed to sentimental scenography, to be a naively shallow architectural souvenir.

Culture is not composed of elements which can be disassembled and re-composed; culture has to be lived. Cultures mature and sediment slowly as they become fused into the context and continuity of tradition. Culture is an entity of facts and beliefs, history and present, material realities and mental conditions. It proceeds unconsciously and cannot be manipulated from outside. Hence an authentic culturally undifferentiated architecture can only be born from differentiated patterns of culture, not from fashionable ideals in design. But do such conditions really exist in our time?

The profoundly Mexican architecture of Luis Barragan, for instance, echoes distinct deep-structure features of Mexican culture and life, particularly the presence of death as an accepted dimension of life, and turns these cultural ingredients into this unique metaphysical and surreal art which is traditional and individual, timeless and radical at the same time.

The architecture of Alvaro Siza is an abstraction and condensation of social and building traditions of Oporto. His architecture is abstracted to the degree that one can hardly trace this tradition but its presence is felt in the authoritative quality of his architecture.

The regionalist architecture of Hungarian Imre Makovecz is more explicitly generated from images of Hungarian mythology and folklore and there is a feeling of cultural scenography in his work that suggests archaic rites; one expects people to appear on the scene dressed in Medieval tunics.
2.6.4 The hidden dimension of culture

As structural anthropology has taught us, the relations of man, artefacts and culture are very complex. The difficulties of rationally conceiving these relations arise mainly because decisive interaction takes place on an unconscious biocultural level. These hidden dimensions have been brilliantly pointed out by Edward T. Hall, whose books on unconscious and culturally-conditioned uses of space are invaluable to an architect. To deny these differences is now pure ignorance. Knowledge of the cultural conditioning of our behaviour in space is rapidly increasing. Recent studies on the spatial geometry concealed in language, for instance, show that even language conditions man’s spatial behaviour in a way specific to that particular language.

Language itself can be used to generate architecture.

Certain deep-structure properties specific to local culture vigorously resist change. For instance, the tone of speech characteristic to a region has been observed to persist through many successive generations after a family has moved from the region. It is quite astonishing to see the persistence of gestural and body language characteristic to a given culture. There is no way of mistaking French or an Italian by his gesturing or an American by his way of walking, or of not instantly spotting an American in European context by his higher level of voice.

Body and muscle system are strongly connected with cultural identity. Evidently an authentic building tradition must be related to such unconscious factors. Mud-building traditions, in West Africa for instance, seem more related to man’s tactile sense than visual. Culturally, there is a tendency to develop away from the tactile towards the visual. Yet we return to the tactile mode in certain emotional states, for instance caressing our dear ones.

Consequently, a culturally-adapted architecture is not merely a matter of visual style but of integration of culture, behaviour and environment. To deny cultural differentiation is foolish. A culturally-specific character or style cannot be consciously learned and added on the surface of design. It is a result of being profoundly subject to a specific pattern of culture and of the creative synthesis which fuses conscious intentions and unconscious conditioning, memories and experiences, in a dialogue between the individual and the collective. All artists elaborate their self-image in their art and a differentiated building tradition supports the collective self-image of an entire culture. This applies also to apparently traditionless building in America, the Strip, for instance.
2.6.5 Individual and tradition

The creative artist’s relation to history is equally complex. Authentic artists are usually more concerned with a general feeling for time and history than any factual history or its products. In an essay written in 1919, entitled “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot describes perceptively this “historical sense” and a poet’s position in the challenge of tradition: ‘Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you can obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature...has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, in what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

‘No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significances, his appreciation is appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison among the dead.

Today’s fashionable attempts to recreate a sense of place and rootedness in history through application of historical and regional motifs usually fail because of the one-dimensionally literal use of reference and a manipulation of motifs on the surface level.

Instead of being born from integrity of cultural forces- the inner necessity, as Kandinsky named it- the historicism of today is a form of intellectual manipulation. Culture is taken as an objectified, external and given reality which can be consciously applied and expressed in design. The past is taken as a source from which to select instead of being the continuum and context of creative work. Instead of being accepted as an autonomous process, culture has been turned into an object of deliberate fabrication.

The present concern with regionalism has the evident danger of turning into sentimental provincialism, whereas vital products of art in our specialized culture are always born from an open confrontation between the universal and unique, the individual and collective, the traditional and the evolutionary.
2.7.0 Regionalist architects and some of their works

As pointed out earlier, the following architects have used a regionalist approach in some of their works. Just to mention a few: Alvar Aalto, Jørn Utzon, Studio Granda, Mario Botta, B.V. Doshi, Charles Correa, Alvaro Siza, Rafael Moneo, Geoffrey Bawa, Raj Rewal, Tadao Ando, Mack Scogin / Merrill Elam, Ken Yeang, William S.W. Lim, Tay Kheng Soon, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Tan Hock Beng. Some of their works are discussed below and others, in chapter four.

2.7.1 Alvar Alto: Säynätsalo Town Hall

Alvar Aalto is the most outspoken advocate of situationally adapted modernity in the Nordic countries as well as within the Modern Movement as a whole.

After his short enthusiasm for the main stream of the Modern Movement and its Universalist ideals, Aalto emphatically expressed his suspicion of universal and techno-utopian ideology. In Aalto’s thinking the task of architecture was to mediate between man and technology and support his social and cultural integration. There is unexplainable sense of rootedness and Finnishness in Aalto’s design. His architecture seems to activate certain deep responses in the observer.

The genius and success of Alvar Aalto’s Säynätsalo Town Hall resides in its understated monumentality, scaled to the common man. Infused with regionalist cues, the entire composition is forthrightly Finnish, while exhibiting a modernist eloquence connecting the work to the wider world. He created a national architectural style through the practice of critical regionalism.

Aalto’s great contribution to architecture is recognized in his advancement of a flexible and adaptable approach to design, which empowers any individual, community, or organization, to express its inherent Individuality, while embracing the modernist
a) The community

The history of Säynätsalo as an industrial community began in 1897, when Johannes Parviainen bought the island and set up a saw mill. In 1914, a plywood mill was started and in 1940, a factory manufacturing complete houses. In 1946, the factories were acquired by Enzo Gutzeit. At the time the town hall was built, some 3,000 people lived on the island and half of them worked in the factory.

b) Main island master plan

In 1924, the mill asked Aalto to design a master plan for the main island. The drawing, which dates from the period 1944-47, is governed by two themes. The first of these is an ‘acropolis’ dedicated to sport and culture at the highest point on the island, and the second is a fan-shaped square, a piazza triangulare, around which are located the building for the municipal administration offices, the head office for the mill, and some shops and low-rise housing.

The fan shape, which Aalto had already applied to the Sunila housing area and used in an experimental town-planning proposal in the United States in 1941, came out strongly.

The causeway and the railway approach the central square from the mainland in the northwest and the direction of the traffic is continued in a fan-shaped park. There are roads on both sides of the park, which join together at the point where the town hall is located, as they rise upwards towards the church road which runs northeast. The fan-shaped central square is thus not an open square, but a clearing in the park lined with vertical pine trunks.

c) The competition

The invited competition for the town hall was announced on September 15, 1949 and a 3000 m² site was defined at the upper end of the clearing - not around the central square as Aalto had previously shown in his town plan.

d) Other entries

Two other architects were invited to take part besides Aalto, Seppo Hytönen, who had designed the local Lehtisaari School and Veikko Raitinen, who had designed the factory offices.
e) Curia
The competition was won by Aalto’s proposal under the pseudonym ‘Curia’. The expert members of the jury appointed by the Association of Finnish Architects were Aulis Blomstedt and Yrjö Lindegren. Their citation declares that the location of the building in the terrain, use of materials, spatial arrangement and costs had all been resolved best in Aalto’s entry.

Furthermore, they pointed out that the ‘dominant council chamber’ represented the monumental character of public building extremely well, but was at the same time, ‘warm and cosy’. The competition was won by Aalto’s proposal under the pseudonym ‘Curia’.

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f) Floor Plan, Roof Plan and Elevations

Fig 2-58: Floor plan, roof plan and elevations

Fig 2-59: Floor plans, Roof Plan, Elevations and Sections
Source: http://www.archweb.it
g) The truss

The most frequently repeated theme in the sketches consists of the roof trusses in the council chamber. There are two distinct versions of these. The simple wooden trusses form a rhythmic feature that Aalto was applying at almost exactly the same time in the student refectory at the University of Jyväskylä (The final version that was actually used is based on a roof structure that Aalto called ‘butterfly’. There are only two of these in the council chamber and visually they form an upwards-opening fan, a kind of crown-like motif. There is also a touch of genius in the functional idea associated with them in so far as they allow the ceiling to be ventilated.

h) Meaning

There are parallels for the tower-like form of the council chamber in older cultures. The pitched roof is well known in Mediterranean rural vernacular architecture with which Aalto was familiar and which he admired. Aalto compared his town hall with Italy's Palazza Pubblico in Siena, both using the courtyard motif to symbolize the center of community and the unification of democratic values.

Aalto's plan may also have been influenced by the vernacular Karelian farmhouse compound he wrote about in 1941, in Architecture in Karelia. “The Karelian house is in a way a building that begins with a single modest cell or with an imperfect embryo building, shelter for a man and animals, and which then figuratively speaking grows year by year.

The expanded Karelian house can in a way be compared with a biological cell formation. This arrangement represents a metaphorical community; council chambers, administrative offices, library, spaces for small business, and residential apartments.
i) Courtyard

The partially enclosed courtyard is elevated one-story above street level, partly in response to the building’s sloping site, and partly to acknowledge the increased status of the public realm (civic government), over the private sector (commercial business). The bi-level library massing works to tie the two domains together.

This admiration for nature is reinforced by the presence of a water fountain symbolizing life, rebirth, and Finland’s generous endowment of freshwater, a natural grass surface underfoot recalling the soft rebound of the forest floor, and direct views of the vertical forest structure beyond.

The inner courtyard of the building does not exist in the earliest sketches and the grassy steps do not appear until the official drawings stage.

On the other hand, the relationship of the building to the terrain and the way it is linked with the natural surroundings are of key importance.

In the sketches, the building is adapted to the contours of the land, and although the inner courtyard eventually used is somewhat artificial, the grassy steps serve as a reminder of the overall form of the ground.

j) Massing

Perhaps the most striking visual aspect of Säynätsalo is the seemingly abstract massing of its individual forms. The staggers and inclines appear to communicate with the irregular profile of the surrounding tree tops, and give the whole composition a more three-dimensional depth.

Aalto may be referencing his fascination with Karelian vernacular form, as recalled in his essay, Architecture in Karelia, “This remarkable ability to grow and adapt is best reflected in the Karelian building’s main architectural principle, the fact that the roof angle isn’t constant.” (Aalto)
k) Material

Aalto’s palette consists of raw, unadorned, materials including red brick, copper, glass and wood.

The slightly rusticated brick is stacked in a Flemish bond pattern, accentuating the organic quality of the material, and wraps from the exterior to the interior.

The use of brick breaks the abstracted forms down to a fine textured, more humanized scale, and recalls the brick of local vernacular industrial structures.

The varied window fenestration patterns reinforce the repetitious patterning of the surrounding forest.
2.7.2 Chadirji, Rifat

According to Hasan-Uddin Khan, the driving force behind the Iraq architect, Rifat Chadirji’s work has been his attempt to reconcile contemporary social needs with new technology. His search for a regional modernism found expression in cement-concrete buildings and in his plans for Baghdad.\(^\text{19}\)

In the Iraq of the 1950s, a flowering of the arts included intensive discussions among architects, artists, writers, and intellectuals about the need for appropriate artistic expressions, influenced by both European ideas and local traditions. The architects Wilson and Mason, who practiced in Iraq in the 1940s and whose buildings interpreted local architecture employing indigenous master masons, also shaped Chadirji’s ideas about regionalism. This approach stagnated somewhat after World War II, when new technologies that bypassed the contribution of the indigenous building industry were introduced. Architects such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Frank Lloyd Wright visited Iraq in the 1960s, encouraging the local Iraqi architects to find their own expression of modern architecture. As a consequence, Chadirji sought to achieve a synthesis between traditional forms and materials and modern technology and building types. He studied local environmental features such as courtyards, screen walls, and natural ventilation. However, until the late 1960s his buildings were clearly functionalist and were determined by structural considerations and modern materials, as evidenced in his Monument to the Unknown Soldier (1959) and in his Tobacco Monopoly Offices and Warehouse (1969), both in Baghdad.\(^\text{20}\)

Chadirji articulated his ideas concerning a modernism informed by tradition in his written works, theories that can be seen in his villa for H.H.Hamood (1972), designed as a dramatic series of parallel vaults.\(^\text{21}\)

In his analysis of built form, Chadirji led the way in the Middle East to re-evaluate architecture’s role in culture and politics. The effects of his contributions have been long lasting and include his vision of rapidly changing architectural forms as mediators between social needs and prevailing technology. The failure to come to terms with this, he postulated, partly explained the collapse of architecture seen in Iraq after\(^\text{22}\)

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1945. Second, Chadirji saw the relationship between local traditional building and international modernism as one in which an “authentic regionalism” based on an abstraction of tradition and modernity could emerge. 23

2.7.3 Bawa, Geoffrey

According to Hasan-Uddin Khan, the Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa is a rare architect whose work combines an environmentally appropriate beauty with a cultural sensitivity. Bawa was educated within the modernist tradition in the West, where he was trained both as a lawyer and as an architect. An urbane, widely read, and well-traveled person, he remains rooted in the soil of his native land. His buildings are predicated on the landscape and climate—he is as much an architect of landscape as he is of buildings.

To Bawa, the pitched roof is the archetype of southern Asian architecture. It is the dominant element that governs his aesthetic, in which shape, texture, and proportion are the strongest visual factors in his buildings. The great roof, with the building’s sides open to the flow of air and the view, give “presence to both function and form, to admit beauty and pleasure as well as purpose” (as told to Hasan-Uddin Khan, 1984).

Another important feature of his work deals with movement through the building, modulated by the rooms, passages, and courtyards that frame vistas or parts of the landscape. Of equal importance is the play of light, in both the built areas and the “rooms” of the landscaping, which gives pleasure in addition to giving comfortable, functional use of the spaces. Bawa pays careful attention to detail, ranging from the expression of structure to the furnishing of rooms, regardless of the scale of the project. Bawa has been fortunate to be in the position to choose his projects and select clients who are sympathetic to his approach. They include artists and intellectuals, private institutions, and government. The perception and organizational skills of his long time partner, Dr. Pooologasundram, an engineer, has enabled the Bawa to realize the buildings as conceived. He has worked with several others in his office for many years, and they also assist him in the development of his ideas. However, Bawa remains the principal and controls every aspect of the design.

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REGIONALISM AND IDENTITY: TOWARDS THE DESIGN OF COUNTY ASSEMBLIES IN KENYA

INTRODUCTION

Bawa designs using numerous freehand sketches, while simultaneously, working on the site layout plan, section, elevation, and details. His partners and colleagues begin to formalize the work with schematic and working drawings. Often construction drawings and details are discussed with the craftsman and are changed. In the mode of the master architect, Bawa will alter his design on-site while the building is under construction. This technique was even used on his large Parliament Complex Colombo which was built by a Japanese company on a turnkey basis, but Bawa’s on-site decisions and solutions proved better and more cost-effective than the original plan.

His personal residences best illustrate his approach to design. His country house, Lunuganga, has been a continuing project since 1950. Set in a garden of 25 acres, the house and its free-standing pavilions overlook terraces and a lake, and illustrate his concerns with site and the expression of a contemporary vernacular. He has periodically added new buildings and elements, such as a large concrete chess set and a grove of trees and benches. Each of the pavilions has its own character and fits into its natural setting. It is perhaps his masterpiece, and was once described by one of the workmen as “a sacred place.” His principal residence in Colombo dates from 1969, and consists of four townhouses joined together with multiple small courtyards and a maze of rooms. It illustrates well his characteristic skill in working with small spaces to create intimacy and a sense of place.

His largest single structure, the Parliamentary Complex in Kotte (1982), is set in an artificially constructed lake. Pavilions of varying size flank the ceremonial building, with its large central volume containing the government assembly chamber and ancillary spaces. The huge copper roofs are reminiscent of monastic and royal buildings of the past yet convey a contemporary image. Bawa’s buildings, both public and private, cover a range of types, and although his work is often classified as “vernacular,” it is executed in varying styles. Bawa’s work is contemporary yet seems to have existed in the landscape over the ages; it is a truly timeless architecture. Artist Barbara Sansoni wrote that his work “represents the distillation of centuries of shared experience, and links at the first level of achievement, its ancient architecture to that of the modern world” (Taylor 1986).

2.7.4 Bureaux D’etudes Henri Chomette

According to Diala Toure, the Bureaux d’Etudes Henri Chomette were architectural firms created in 1949 by Henri Chomette, a French-born architect who established himself in Africa ten years before the independence achievements. Active in Africa from 1949 until 1993 and concentrated in Francophone West Africa (Senegal, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Togo) and central Africa (Cameroon and Gabon), the Bureaux d’Etudes Henri Chomette in 50 years gained a sustained reputation based on the contribution of African architects, engineers, craftsmen, and artists in the building of modern African states.  

Born in Saint-Etienne (a city near Lyon), Henri Chomette (1921–95) developed early a passion for architecture. A student of Tony Garnier in Lyon (1941–45), Othello Zavaronni, and Gustave Perret at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1945–46), Chomette earned his degree in architecture in 1946. An admirer of Le Corbusier and intern in his atelier de la rue de Sèvres 35 in Paris, Chomette rapidly gained recognition as a major architect for the Reconstruction period after World War II throughout his practice in Paris, Le Havre, and Lille. In France, the difficult period of Reconstruction with “normalized architecture” and the takeover of geometers and engineers in the architectural project limited architects’ initiative, creativity, and control over their projects for public buildings.

Another fact differentiated architects working for the Bureaux d’Etudes Henri Chomette from their peers: their originality in reflecting and respecting African cultures, architectural patrimony, and environment in all steps of the projects, from beginning to finalization. In opposition to many practitioners of the time, who merely transplanted European architectural epitomes derived from the International Style and from all types of revivals (including classical, Normand, and Provençal), Chomette and his colleagues intensively produced both a local and a modern architecture considering cultures and their environment. In their quest for authenticity through simplicity, all partners of the Bureaux d’Etudes Henri Chomette clearly understood that modern architecture in Africa needed use technology in order to serve social values and to suit popular needs.
Romanticized imagery about giant thatch-roofed cabins in the middle of a modern city, as well as out-of-place urban-planning theories derived from “masters” such as Le Corbusier were not apropos in the architectural repertoire and agenda of Chomette’s firms. The latter offered an African alternative based on society, economy, and technology during transitional periods preceding and following the independence processes.28

Numerous projects in the heart of capitals such as Dakar, Abidjan, Niamey, Lome, and Cotonou, and in secondary cities are attributed to the Bureaux d’Etudes Henri Chomette. Their activity included urban planning, housing projects, public administrations, embassies, hospitals, schools, transportation, hotels, banks, private residences, and industrial buildings and structures.29


Similarities can be seen between the Bureaux d’Etudes Henri Chomette’s early works in the 1950s and the later ones in the 1990s. Some of these concepts greatly influenced new generations of African architects, such as Abou Koffi, Andree Diop, and Habib Diene, who acknowledged the pioneering and quintessential work of the Bureaux d’Etudes Henri Chomette. Major innovations and concepts include the following:

i. Integration of cultural features and connections referring to the population concerned in the concept, design, spatial organization, and aesthetics of public and private buildings (the
stairway of honor of the National Palace of Benin in Cotonou [1963] consisted of several\textsuperscript{31} 356 royal insignias and seals of Abomey, former capital of the kingdom of Dahomey)

ii. Use of local materials and modern techniques

iii. Structural transformation of buildings (for the City Hall of Abidjan built in 1956, the facade was composed of revolving wooden panels for natural ventilation that later were turned into a evolving thermal double glazing in the 1970s)

iv. Partnership with African craftsmen, artisans, and artists in all steps of the projects

v. Integration of Plastic Arts into the architectural project.

One observes the longevity of the Bureaux d'Etudes Henri Chomette through a solid local structure and independent management, the knowledge and enforcement of all the\textsuperscript{32} rules connected with building markets throughout West Africa, and the quality of economically realistic and culturally oriented projects.

The quintessential partnership with local architects, engineers, craftsmen, and artists reinforced the cultural identity of the architectural work of the Bureaux d'Etudes Henri Chomette, whose existence and expression served primarily Africans by defining and designing a modern architecture completely African in its concept and its destination.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31}R. Stephen Sennott, Editor, Encyclopedia of 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Architecture, Volume 1, A-F, Fitzny Dearborn, New York London 2004 Pg. 356
\textsuperscript{32} Pg 357
\textsuperscript{33} Pg 358
2.8.0 Aga Khan Award for Architecture

Established in 1977 by His Highness the Aga Khan, the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture aims to enhance the understanding of Islamic culture and its architecture. The program, administered by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, recognizes and awards architectural excellence, with special concern for contemporary design, social housing, community development, restoration, conservation, and environmentalism. One of the principles of the Aga Khan Foundation has been to encourage sustainability whereby recipients of the Aga Khan’s largesse would themselves be able to reinvest in the future of their own communities. The Aga Khan’s influence is widespread and includes the establishment in the United States of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (1979), jointly run by the Massachusetts Institute for Technology and Harvard University, and the creation of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.34

In 1976 the Aga Khan announced that he would establish an architectural award as a means of fostering the growth of a modern and vibrant Islamic architecture within the context of rich and valuable traditions. In spanning political and geographical boundaries, a major objective of the award was to create an overarching sense of unity for the Muslim world, in spite of distinctive and sometimes disparate cultures. “Excellence in architecture” was attributed not only to examples of finely designed architecture, but also to community projects, such as housing for the poor and civil engineering works, clearly demonstrating the future direction of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.35

In 1988, the Aga Khan reorganized his network of philanthropic institutions. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture was transferred from the Aga Khan Foundation to the newly established Aga Khan Trust for Culture, also responsible for the Historic Cities Support Programme and the Education and Culture Programme. The goals of these cultural agencies were aligned with the Aga Khan’s original list of challenges for the Islamic world—pursuit of excellence in architecture and related disciplines, conservation and re-use of historic buildings and spaces, and education for architects and urban planners. A fourth objective of the Trust for Culture was to encourage the interchange of ideas to enhance awareness of the relationship

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between historic and contemporary Muslim cultures and their built environments. On occasion, the Aga Khan has bestowed a special Chairman’s Award to recognize outstanding achievement in Muslim architecture. In 1980 the first was presented to Egypt’s Hassan Fathy, architect, artist, and poet, particularly acknowledging his encouragement of vernacular building systems and his work improving the built environment of impoverished peoples. Others have followed and include Rifat Chadirji of Iraq and Geoffrey Bawa of Sri Lanka.

Recipients of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture have now more than 80, and they have been as diverse as the cultures they represent. Juries concerned with self-sustainability often appreciated projects demonstrating the viability of vernacular construction techniques and traditional building forms or the use of locally available materials. This priority is evident in the Yaama Mosque in Tahoua, Niger (1986 award) and the Stone Building System employed in Dar’a Province, Syria (1992 award).

This awards program has significantly inspired the architectural representation of Islamic culture during the past 25 years. At a time when many of these cultures were threatened by Western influence, by economic failure, and by political violence, the Aga Khan’s initiative reminded everyone of the quality of this cultural heritage. At the same time, the award’s broad scope, with its emphasis on alleviating living conditions of the poor, on sustainability, and on the environment, has encouraged innovative solutions to rapidly worsening societal problems. Although this award does not fit the mould of Western architectural perceptions, its initial priorities were clearly established and are constantly evolving to meet the needs of many cultural communities. Emphasizing not only contemporary architecture, but also historic architectural traditions threatened by reconstruction and development, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture has helped to create a means of expressing Islamic ideals in a modern context. The award promotes a sense of pride in Muslim culture, and the vast number of submissions has facilitated documentation of over 6,000 works of modern Islamic architecture, providing inspiration for future generations.

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2.9.0 Drawbacks existing in the popularity of regionalism in Kenya.

According to a survey study carried out by Prof. Robert Rukwaro, on Form making in Architecture, and published in the Africa Habitat 6 (2012), Majority of the practising architects rely on the international style and works of international architects to draw their inspirations.

Further, the architects, gave different reasons as to why they shun the traditional Kenyan architecture. Some of the reasons were, because of the influence of globalization and modernity in the areas of materials, techniques and design concepts. They said that the global trends in the building technology and materials have not been in tandem with Kenyan traditional architecture which has remained as it was and very little development has taken place in the last one century. According to the survey, 65% of the respondents said that the local architects were trained using Western syllabi/ curricula and most case studies used to teach were from Western world.

Graph 2.1: Sources of Inspiration for form making in Kenya
Original Source: Field Survey 2012 by Prof. Robert Rukwaro
Author Modified.
The main reason why Kenyan architects are not using the 42 ethnic groups’ traditional architecture as a base for their design was a weak database and poor documentation of the same. 39% of the respondents said that the traditional architecture lacks comprehension and variety, and that the basic forms were difficult to envision their growth in urban areas. 39% respondent architects said that the architectural education was the main cause of the setback in developing the Kenyan traditional architecture.

Other parties responsible for lack of regionalist approach to architecture in Kenya besides the architects are, the government, the clients, and the architectural education.

Graph 2-2: Reasons why architects shun the traditional Kenyan architecture
Original Source: Field Survey 2012 by Prof. Robert Rukwaro
Author Modified.