Architecture vs. Globalization

Beata Majerska-Palubicka

Faculty of Architecture, Silesian University of Technology; ul. Akademicka 7, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland
beata.majerska-palubicka@polsl.pl

Abstract. Globalization affects all areas of life. It is also present in architecture. It is a continuous process that has definitely accelerated in recent years. Global processes, fast flow and exchange of information, ease of movement and extensive experience related to them allow crossing borders and breaking barriers of culture, politics, and in architecture, losing regional features and changing aesthetics. All of these factors definitely affect changes in design processes and architectural message. Architectural design takes on a new expression resulting from the cultural mix as well as the detachment from the context, tradition and often cultural roots. The first example of globalization in architecture was the International Style (the rise of the 1920s), which was characterized, among others, by a free plan, the form of objects resulting from functions, large glazing and the lack of ornamentation. It experienced its splendour in the 1930s-1960s. Today, its features are still being noticed in world architecture. Repeatability, unification and typification as well as copying and commercialization, the pursuit of a dominant, detachment from cultural, climatic, natural and often social context result in the design and implementation of objects with the same characteristics in culturally, climatically, naturally and economically different environmental contexts. The research questions posed in the article are: To what extent do globalization processes lead to the loss of national/local/regional identity? Can this process be prevented in the context of architecture? How to create sustainable architecture and preserve its regional character in the conditions of progressing globalization? The goal is to confront the ideas of sustainable development and globalization and to show the consequences of globalization in the transformation of the architectural message. The research methods used were: case studies, literature studies, basic in-situ research and a descriptive method. The reason for taking up the topic was the research conducted by the author during study trips to European, Asian and American countries.

1. Introduction
The nature of the contemporary epoch brings many contradictory phenomena of a global reach. On the one hand, one should quote examples of economic and technological development, the pursuit of material goods and prosperity, consumption and related devastation of the natural environment inevitably leading to an ecological cataclysm. On the other hand, one can find an opposing paradigm of sustainable development focusing on regional and cultural values, local scenery, reduction of the consumption of power and material goods, which lead to the consideration and respect for the natural environment. Globalization has become a sign of our times, which affects all areas of life. It is a continuous process resulting from a material culture, which has definitely quickened its pace in recent years. Global processes, a fast flow and exchange of information, technological development, easiness of travel and mobility make it possible to cross many borders, whereas the abundance of experiences result in pushing the boundaries in many areas. Such phenomena crucially determine the role and
The significance of architecture in human life as well as influence its form and function. This fact is revealed, among other things, in the alteration of architectural media and aesthetics as well as in the change in perception and interpretation of architectural message. In the context of the world becoming the global village, where nationality of both creators and recipients is of secondary significance, architectural designing gains a new meaning resulting from a cultural mixture and detachment from the context, tradition and often cultural roots. In order to maintain the continuity of identity and development, architects should provoke extensive discussions about the architecture reflecting contemporary trends of mass culture. They should draw conclusions and conduct conscious assessments. In author’s opinion, the discussion may be triggered by two factors. The first one is the analysis of the shaping of architecture in the context of globalization tendencies, illustrated by selected examples. The second one is the confrontation between the ideas of regionalism and globalization in order to show the consequences of globalization in the transformation of architectural media (message).

On the basis of in situ investigations and analyses of the architecture of Alpine countries, where the influence of both currents (global and regional) is significantly noticeable, as well as on the grounds of literature studies and a descriptive method, it was undertaken to provide answers to the posed research question: To what extent do the globalization processes lead to the loss of local identity?; Can this process be prevented in the context of architecture?; How to create sustainable architecture and preserve its regional character in the context of progressing globalization?

This paper aims to present deliberations on contemporary architecture in the context of the requirements of the present-day epoch and modern users. It also poses a question about features which characterize or should characterize the architecture reflecting the nature of the contemporary age. The search for the answers to above-asked questions involved phenomenon of globalization and its relation to architecture in context of present-day methods, trends, tendencies in creation of built environment.

2. From regionalism to globalization in architecture

All stages of the civilization development witnessed a dependence, which was resulting from very complex relationships, between the context of environment and the art of building and architecture. Practical reasons resulting from the need for survival, such as shelter, safety and security, constituted the basis for the development of the building art connected with the human existence from the stage of the development of settlements and later in the form of more advanced architecture. Both the building art and architecture were of a utilitarian nature since the dawn of time. They served the purpose of the satisfaction of essential human needs. They were characterized by the tradition of using local materials as well as formal and constructional solutions. It can be stated that they had full compatibility of function, construction and form resulting from the context [1].

The art of building adapted to and depended on the requirements of the local climate, topography, agriculture and native natural building materials. In doing so, it provided an essential condition for survival. Over the time, the level of knowledge, skills and awareness as well as the development of technology, building art and social prosperity contributed to the creation of local, regional forms of housing and native architecture. Architecture had been developing in different parts of the world expressing disparate ideas, local faith and philosophy, which were usually the reflection of the relations with the place of its creation. The strength of such solutions lay in the architecture of context which created the foundations of the cultural heritage of a given place. The underlying reasons for such differences and consolidation of regional features were as follows: natural barriers, climatic conditions, national borders, political differences, cultural barriers, etc. The above-mentioned factors imposed, in a natural and obvious way, different needs, opinions, the level and way of life, whereas in relation to architecture, they resulted in different basic solutions, structures, building materials, functions and forms of construction. In the further stages of civilization development, the shaping factors were as follows: tradition, religion, culture, economy and aesthetic reasons, which were related to philosophical, ideological, symbolical systems or the legitimization of power. Nowadays, such factors encompass the development of technology, communication, economic position, etc.
It was already in the 19th century, that the world industrial exhibitions (e.g. in 1873 in Vienna, 1878 in Paris, 1879 in Copenhagen, etc.) showing innovative technological and structural solutions, promoted and spread the knowledge of styles and features of regional architecture. The above-mentioned features became fashionable and popular, therefore they were accepted and implemented in other countries which had no direct connection with the region of their origin. The most attractive styles proved to be: Neo-Russian, Swiss or Alpine and Nordic, as they significantly influenced other regions [2]. Elements and patterns of the style of Swiss architecture, which were based on the motifs of folk architecture, enjoyed the greatest popularity and exerted the greatest influence not only in Europe. This fact led to the loss of original features of the style and the birth of a new, universal, cosmopolitan style of wooden Alpine architecture. This architecture became detached from its local, cultural and geographical context. It was the beginning of the road to perdition of the ties between the local shaping factors and the architectural and building solutions.

Nowadays, the intensive development of capital, technology, particularly information and communication technology, contributes to general accessibility. Therefore, place and distance play no role anymore. This leads to integration, standardization and co-dependence of states, nations, economic systems and at the same time marginalization of national cultures. What happens is the unification and homogenization of patterns and models in all areas of life. Today, when crossing borders has become everyday experience, the limitations which shaped regional features of architecture have ceased to be an element influencing the preservation of individual local features.

Globalization phenomenon develops at four basic levels: economic, technological, political and cultural. On the one hand, this results in the extension of contacts, exchange of innovative thought and technology, free access to scientific achievements of developed countries. On the other hand, it means the mixing of cultural elements, blurring of differences between cultures, and in drastic situations the disappearance of cultures of weaker countries and regions. Material culture is influenced by homogenization and unification, which causes a considerable standardization of cultural models. Simultaneously, overwhelming consumptionism imposes same or very similar products on everybody [3][4]. In the context of architecture, this phenomenon reveals itself in the unification or fading away of national or regional identities. In consequence, there is a growing fear that architects might fall into a trap of creating a single, and the only one, global style. A style in the history of architecture which was a harbinger of globalization in today’s understanding was the International Style [5].

In Europe, in 1907, the foundation of Deutscher Werkbund sparked new ideas in contemporary architecture, which became to be perceived as the synthesis of art, craft and technology. Following the First World War, as a result of many circumstances the architecture of modernism was born. Its assumptions of the development of pure form, functionality and economy of detail were compatible to the style of a new, post-war, social and economic order. To put it simply, it can be assumed that modernism owes its genesis to the civilization of industry and technological development based on positive ethical premises as well as postulates of rationalism and liberalism, similarly to many other ideological movements at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The postulates Form follows function by Louis Sullivan, Less is more by Mies van der Rohe and Ornament is crime by Adolf Loos became the foundations of the search for modern forms, functional solutions, testing technological capacities of new materials and technologies1. The activities of such groups as Dutch De Stijl, French L’Esprit Nouveau and the German school of Bauhaus became noticeable. The climax of their activity was the exhibition entitled: ‘The International Style: Architecture Since 1922’ organized in the art gallery ‘MoMA’ in New York in 1932. The name of the International Style, given by the exhibition curators Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock, accentuated the universal character of contemporary

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1 At the close of the 19th century, a significant role was played by engineers implementing designs of warehouses, industrial plants, exhibition halls and other civil engineering objects, like bridges or viaducts, meeting the demand of the market. Understanding the aesthetics of the classical style, the most outstanding representatives of modernism perceived it from the angle of the latest technological achievements. There was a risk that architects excelling only at the stylistics of the academic current would be pushed aside to the role of an assistant of the construction engineer. The attempts were made to develop new architectural aesthetics adaptable to new demands resulting from the technology based on new materials. However, these attempts aimed, first of all, to satisfy the social needs for the architecture related to a housing function, railway service (railway stations) and industry.
architecture adopting similar forms in different countries. The curators aimed to emphasize that it was a new current deprived of national differences, introducing a common language of universal architecture, understandable, functional and economic, dealing with social problems; the architecture which could be designed by architects irrespective of their origin, opinions or countries.[5][6] Typical features of the International Style were shaped, namely simple, regular bodies, the lack of external ornamentation of buildings as well as dependence of the aesthetics of form on function. What was emphasized was the significance of utility in architecture, straight lines and angles as well as geometrical forms of buildings with flat or sloped roofs (skillion roofs). Thanks to the development of industry and technology, the application of new building materials, such as steel and reinforced concrete, made it possible to construct skeletal building structures. The skeletal structure enabled the introduction of innovative designing and artistic premisses. This was reflected in the designing of open-plan objects with large glazed surfaces, which gave an impression of the permeation of the interior space with the external space [7]. The International Style in architecture aroused interest from the very beginning. After the Second World War, the style enjoyed bigger and bigger popularity and became the dominating current in the modernist architecture. It was flourishing and reached the height of popularity in the 1940s and the 1950s. Following the growing popularity of the style and the creators’ conviction of the rightness of their designing decisions, there came objections concerning the repeatability and monotony of solutions, lack of diversity and otherness, but first of all, lack of a relationship with the context of the place and negligence of users’ needs.

International architecture seemed to be no longer functional and serving the human being. On the other hand, the human user appeared to be an anonymous individual who should adjust to the newly built architecture. Late examples of the architecture in the International Style were implemented until the 1990s. Nowadays, in the context of overpowering globalization connected with general homogenization and unification, newly constructed objects allude to the International Style. Le Corbusier’s five points of modern architecture start to appear in various contexts all over the world.

Over the years, the transfer of information by the architectural form has been changing, from the presentation of the feats of engineering to architectural and designing hybrids supported by the state-of-the-art planning and designing processes as well as cutting-edge technologies. The symbolic of objects in the context of global reception becomes very distinctive and stereotypical. It becomes an icon of a global reach, often raising such an object to the level of an international ‘logo’ of a product detached from its local cultural contexts. This leads through the unification, commercialization, copying and typology of architecture to the blurring of national and regional identity, and creates conflict with the ideas of sustainable development being the paradigm of civilization development continuity. In surprisingly different contexts and regions of the world, there appear the same or very similar urban-planning and architectural solutions as well as constructed objects or elements of small architecture (Figures 1,2).

![Figure 1. Lighting element of green areas around the National Sports Stadium in Beijing, designer Herzog & de Meuron; (Photo by author)](image-url)
3. Globalization vs. architecture preserving the continuity of regional identity

Nowadays, urban-development and architectural solutions show distinct effects of the phenomenon of globalization. These effects are present all over the world and adopt the form of social, economic and cultural phenomena, such as the depopulation of city centres or block housing estates, appearance of blockers, social degeneration and crime increase [5]. All of them have been caused by ignoring local models and users’ needs. In the name of modernity, progress and technological development, such unification has a crucial impact on the uniformity, homogeneity of the built environment scenery and the destruction of spatial order. Today’s designers, in a similar way to the creators of the International Style, seek technological novelties, use innovative tools supporting the designing processes, simplify form and copy standard solutions, which often leads to the negligence of users’ needs and of the contextual meaning. With a view to that, contemporary architecture should provoke reflections and careful deliberations.

Nevertheless, in this gloomy context there is an increasing appearance of urban-planning and architectural solutions which meet the challenge of globalization in the name of the ideas of the paradigm of sustainable development. Such solutions enter into a dialogue with the context of a place and local housing development of a region, and look for inspiration in them. Many times, design solutions which are implemented with respect for the values of traditional architecture are the result of the search for a compromise between creative visions of the authors and the requirements of spatial order as well as widely understood context. A good example is the architecture of Alpine countries, including Austria and Switzerland, as such architecture matches and blends into the context of the built and natural environment (Figures 3,4).

Figure 3. Example of the dialogue between architecture and the natural environment context - ski jump tower Bergisel in Innsbruck, designer Zaha Hadid; a.) General view; b.) Arcades around the ski jump tower; c.) Forest surrounding the object. (Photo by author)
Contemporary architecture – balanced between globalization and regionalism – is a reaction to design universalism, uniformity, stereotypes and simplifications in the shaping of space.[2][9] It might sound like truism that the co-existence of new, contemporary building development with the regional building development within the scope of one urban complex (city, district, quarter) is possible on condition that the features of new architecture will refer and allude to the features of the existing architecture and the rules of the spatial order will be complied with.[10] However, it is not easy to accomplish this task. Nevertheless, there are numerous examples of the aspirations to maintain local identity in contemporary architecture in western European countries. The transformations of the existing tissue resulting from the implementation of new building development often aim at the creation of specific and unique character of the architecture of a given place. Among other places, in Switzerland, Luxemburg and other Alpine countries, the use of innovative technological solutions along with the continuation of traditional architectural forms often result in excellent modern solutions. The continuity of regional values with the application of modern solutions does not mean the repetition of models from previous historical periods, as they are usually connected with the already non-existent needs. The objective is to maintain such external features of regional architecture which improve the quality of the present-day built environment and spatial order while using innovative solutions in the scope of structure, construction and building materials. (Figure 5,6)

In this context, it is impossible not to mention the principles of Critical Regionalism and their significance for the creation of sustainably built environment. The Critical Regionalism, in its modified version, gained popularity particularly in some countries with strong traditions of regional architecture, for instance in Switzerland or Sweden. In these countries, in accordance with Kenneth Frampton’s assumptions, one may encounter examples of critical, but progressive, drawing on the experience and achievements of contemporary architecture with simultaneous consideration of the contextual values, such as: topography, climate, light, and tectonics [11][12][13]. Nevertheless, it can
be stated on the basis of research that this is possible only in such cultures which have been able to resist the pressure from the universal civilization [14].

4. Conclusions
A commonly imposed style of aggressive consumption and pop-culture poses a threat of the perdition in globalism. However, the phenomenon of sustainable development makes it possible to enter into a dialogue of mutual respect, which is the condition for the co-existence of local, regional and global values. Cultural and economic diversity provides space for the exchange of values, which in turn leads to the spiritual and material development. This generates certain needs which influence the requirements set in relation to the living environment, including architecture.

In the context of globalization, the re-definition of local folklore is becoming an essential strategy in the preservation of regional architectural features. This involves the use of local resources and materials, adaptation to the local context, using architecture as a dialogue platform. What is important in this case is the requirements of the sustainable development paradigm, which enable the discourse with the context and the user through function, form, technology and material applied [15].

The question – how to create sustainable architecture with the preservation of its regional character in conditions of increasing globalization – is becoming a catalyst for the exchange of opinions and the discussion on the thesis that regionalism, as a sign of diversity, is precious and constitutes the source of versatile inspirations. It is not difficult to notice that the time of limiting the image of regions solely to folklore and contemporary version of folk arts and crafts definitely belongs in the late 20th century. What gains significance is that living in present day and acting locally people become global by moving around and travelling as well as through participation in wide social and economic life. In spite of continuously propagated globalization concepts, the existing cultural differences constitute an essential phenomenon of the contemporary world and are harbingers of the development of modern regionalism. This means re-interest in the identity of the closest vicinity, its natural curiosities, traditions, culture and current events in which one can directly take part [16].

Case analyses prove that a proper way to achieve and preserve unique and very often culturally precious character and climate of a certain place is first of all the maintenance of the spatial order, the contexts of local scenery, natural environment, culture and the respect for the value of regional architecture. What is significant is the reference to the context by the interpretation of the features of regional architecture in accordance with contemporary requirements and living standards (Figures 6, 7).

![Figure 6. Blurring of boundaries between the environmental context and architecture; a.), b.) Helvetia, extension of head office in St. Gallen, designer Herzog & de Meuron. (Photo by author); c.) Chesa Futura in St. Moritz, designer N. Foster. (Photo by author)](image_url)

Other important recommendations are the avoidance of architectural unification, commercialization and thoughtless copying. The strengthening of valuable features of the existing traditional building development of a region, of its layout of urban-planning composition and forms of buildings enables the protection and preservation of the identity of local building culture – and consequently, the continuity of the civilization development [8]. The premises of the Critical Regionalism should
constitute an essential element in the creation of the contemporary built environment – the element which is equivalent to the need of implementing artistic and creative visions.

**Figure 7.** Preservation of the climate (atmosphere) of a place – material, colour, matching the context; a.) Kunstmuseum in Liechtenstein, designer M. Morger, H. Degelo, Ch. Kerez; b.) Tirol Panorama Museum in Bergisel, designer Stoll Wagner, (Photo by author)

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