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A Reading on Cultural Identity in Contemporary Turkish Architecture: Interpretive Strategies in the Works of Turgut Cansever and Nevzat Sayın

Masoud Matinpour  and Nazan Kirci 

Department of Architecture, Gazi University, Ankara, Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Turkish architecture has endeavored to shape itself in a distinctive quest for identity between universal values and local cultural identity since the founding of the Republic. Turkish architects have developed various approaches that reinterpret cultural identity to address this dilemma. This study examines the cultural and intellectual dynamics of the search for identity in Turkish architecture from the second half of the twentieth century to the twenty-first century through influential examples. The primary objective is to understand how architects have integrated cultural identity into architectural design processes and the strategies they employed. The methodological framework is Kenneth Frampton's critical regionalism discourse, as established in "Ten Points on an Architecture of Regionalism: A Provisional Polemic." Exemplary structures are analyzed through criteria determining cultural identity in architectural works. The study examines the works of Turgut Cansever and Nevzat Sayın, focusing on their approaches to translating cultural values into contemporary architectural language and their theoretical foundations. Cansever carries traditional Ottoman-Islamic heritage into modern context, while Sayın demonstrates highly context-sensitive approaches. Research findings reveal that both architects employ distinct yet complementary strategies in conveying cultural identity. Cansever grounds his approach in metaphysical understanding emphasizing organic wholeness, whereas Sayın proceeds from phenomenological sensitivity prioritizing contextual dialogue. The results demonstrate that successful integration of cultural identity emerges through balanced combination of these approaches. This study contributes by analyzing the relationship between cultural identity and contemporary architectural design within a theoretical framework, presenting a methodological foundation for future architectural design practice.

*Corresponding Author

Email: masood_matinpour@hotmail.com

Tel: +(90) 553 306 8316

1. Introduction

Contemporary Turkish architecture has been in a quest for distinctive identity since the beginning of its modernization journey. Throughout this process, from the second half of the twentieth century to the present, Turkish architects have developed various strategies to translate cultural identity into contemporary design language. While the problematic of modernization and identity is frequently addressed in Turkish architectural literature, discussions generally concentrate on historical narratives or individual interpretations by architects. The mechanisms for sustaining cultural identity in architectural works are limited to examples analyzed within a specific theoretical framework.

The importance of this research converges on several fundamental points. Firstly, the study analyzes the quest for sustaining cultural identity in contemporary Turkish architecture through the criteria established by Kenneth Frampton for critical regionalism [1]. Thus, it presents an interdisciplinary perspective by positioning a local problematic within global architectural discourse. Secondly, by examining comparatively the works of pioneering architects such as Turgut Cansever and Nevzat Sayın in terms of their formal, intellectual, contextual, historical contexts, and cultural identity continuity strategies, it reveals lessons and methodologies that can be learned from successful works. This study constitutes a resource for architectural practice and education by presenting a theoretical and methodological framework for future design approaches.

The criteria established by Kenneth Frampton for critical regionalism provide an analytical framework for the sustainability of cultural identity [1]. This approach enables the analysis of the local-universal debate in Turkish architecture and ensures that cultural references are sustained through analytical methods rather than superficial imitation. In line with this primary objective, the following goals have been determined:

- To identify the fundamental approaches followed by exemplary Turkish architects when incorporating cultural references (form, space, material, etc.) into the design process.
- To evaluate comparatively, through the works of exemplary architects, the analytical methods of strategies for translating cultural values into contemporary architectural language.
- To reveal the differences between concepts constituting cultural identity by discussing them through concrete examples.
- To evaluate how the quest for cultural identity in Turkish architecture is grounded in the context of global architectural theories.

Due to the nature of the methodological approach adopted here, certain limitations and conditions exist. According to Frampton, critical regionalism has been criticized for being a fragile theory and vague as a design approach [2]. Therefore, in the interpretation of exemplary structures, ways to understand and develop different dimensions of this discourse are explored, going beyond its not-so-clear secrets. Consequently, the analyses conducted and conclusions reached in this research should be evaluated not as absolute truths, but as one of the possible readings made from a specific theoretical framework. At the same time, the subjective dimensions of architectural identity make it inevitable that perceivers draw different inferences from the same work. The selection of architects and works to be examined does not claim to represent the entirety of architectural production in Turkey but is limited to examples that stand out with their approaches and theoretical foundations, most appropriate to the research problem and allowing for comparative analysis. Furthermore, the geographical boundaries of the research are limited to Turkey's Aegean region, and the temporal boundaries to the period extending from the second half of the twentieth century to the present. The reason for this temporal limitation is the observation that a maturity began to emerge during this period in the transmission of cultural identity.

The concept of cultural identity, which forms the theoretical framework of the research, has been addressed by many architects in contemporary Turkish architecture. Turgut Cansever and Nevzat Sayın stand out as names who have examined and concretized this concept at both theoretical discourse and architectural practice levels. This situation constitutes the fundamental starting point of the sample selection. Thus, it has been ensured that the research is not limited to a single architectural approach.

The primary justification for selecting Turgut Cansever as a research sample lies in the architect's centering of the cultural identity issue through his intellectual and structural practice sustained throughout his lifetime. Cansever has frequently been the subject of research by important architectural historians such as Uğur Tanyeli and Doğan Hasol, and his contributions to the architectural thought of his period have found extensive coverage in academic literature. Moreover, Cansever holds a privileged position as the only architect in Turkey to receive the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, which rewards sensitivity to cultural values, three times. In this context, Cansever's Demir Holiday Village (1983) project received 12 votes in the "Architecture Evaluating Its Past: Buildings Ranking" survey conducted by Mimarlık Magazine in 2003, ranking among the top 20 buildings, supporting the work's position in the professional community with objective data [3].

The fundamental justification for including Nevzat Sayın in the sample group is the architect's effort to keep the cultural identity discourse alive both theoretically and practically, especially in the twenty-first century, based on the texts and interviews he has published. Sayın, as one of the rare architects in his generation to sustain this theme, has been the subject of academic studies, and his works have frequently found coverage in architectural publications. This situation is of critical importance for the research in terms of observing the continuity of the quest for cultural identity in the contemporary period.

Geographical and functional homogeneity has also been considered in sample selection. Both buildings are located in Turkey's Aegean Region and carry residential-holiday village functions. This similarity enables control of variables in the research's comparative analysis, thus allowing clearer demonstration that differences on the axis of cultural identity stem from architectural approaches.

2. Cultural Identity in Architecture

Identity in architecture refers to the manner in which built environments reflect the identity of individuals, communities, and cultures. It encompasses signification processes in cultural, social, historical, and geographical contexts. According to Tanyeli (2013), identity in architecture is not only a means of social representation but also an area where historical continuity and cultural memory are embodied. This also emphasizes that architectural identity is not only an aesthetic but a social signification process [4].

The relationship between architecture and identity is bidirectional. Abel (2000) states that architecture is both a product and producer of cultural identity [5]. According to Castells (2010), identity is a dynamic process that is continuously structured and restructured [6]. Architectural identity also transforms and is reinterpreted within the historical process. Globalization, technological advances, and social changes contribute to this dynamic understanding of identity. Architecture is the physical representation of a culture's traditions, values, and history. Culture exhibits an identity that develops by balancing tradition with contemporary needs. However, architects may face difficulties in respecting cultural heritage while innovating and integrating global influences while preserving local context.

When examining definitions of culture, culture is explained as the totality of knowledge, belief, art, law, and habits. Rapoport's (2004) three-dimensional consideration of culture as way of life, system of symbolic schemas, and ecological adaptation process demonstrates the dynamic and multilayered nature of the concept. Rapoport also emphasizes that culture has functions that regulate daily life rules, frameworks that integrate social parts, and functions that differentiate groups [7]. Morin (2019) defines culture as a dual-dimensional structure that harbors both cognitive-technical capital and distinctive identity capital together [8].

Space is the most powerful reflection area of cultural identity. Bourdieu (1977) argues that spatial experiences play a constitutive role in coding social relations [9]; according to Özdemir (2013) and Özbek (2019), cultural norms are fundamental elements that shape space and give meaning to place [10, 11]. Thus, architectural culture is positioned as a multilayered production area where social, political, and economic conditions are embodied, transcending functional needs.

Architecture is a fundamental area of expression that embodies a society's values, beliefs, and collective memory. Elements such as geography, history, language, and tradition shape cultural differentiation. Architectural

structures represent the spatial reflections of these cultural references [12]. In cultural systems, the role of history becomes apparent through the tension between change and continuity. According to Moustafa (1988), under extraordinary change conditions, cultural symbols either adapt to new conditions or resist change. In this framework, architecture emerges as an area that makes spatial meaning layers visible in identity production [13].

Architecture is among the basic sign systems of societies together with language, religion, and art; through this system, it carries values into space. Therefore, while architecture is a functional discipline, it is a cultural production area as the expression of social order and worldviews. Previous research (Moustafa, 1988) argues that architecture is a sign system that guides not knowledge but experience and behavioral patterns; with this representational power, it transforms humans and social reality [13].

2.1. Modern Architecture and Emerging Discourses Thereafter

Although modern architecture emerged in the early twentieth century with emphasis on functionalism, technological progress, and universality, it fails to meet today's architectural requirements. Mumford's regionalism discussion was criticized by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1948 and 1965. Mumford's views contain serious criticism of modern architecture's aspects that transform cities' appearance by disregarding place and context [14]. In subsequent years, Pallasmaa (2019) stated that this style offered only a visual and technical language, neglecting human experience [15]. Frampton (2016), on the other hand, defended architecture's integration with local context through the critical regionalism paradigm [16].

Postmodernism emerged in the 1960s as a direct reaction to the alienation brought by modern architecture. Its advocates such as Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks emphasized pluralism, historical reference, and ornamentation to reintroduce cultural symbolism to the built environment [17, 18]. However, Habermas (2016) noted that these criticisms were interpreted in different ways, with some advocating "critical continuation of tradition" while others declaring the "postmodern era" [19]. The reason for this is that postmodernism carries the risk of sometimes representing local identity with superficial stereotypes.

Unlike postmodernism's symbolic complexity, critical regionalism aims to establish a fundamentally and meaningfully authentic relationship with place, avoiding mere decoration. It aims both to preserve local authenticity and respond to universal design problems by harmonizing the practical approach of vernacular architecture with modern technologies.

Tzonis (2003) states that critical regionalism emerged from the approach of architects seeking alternatives to postmodernism. Emphasizing that the widespread concept of regionalism ignored modern design, he expressed that they combined the Kantian concept of "critical" with regionalism [20]. According to Cohen (2012), new internationalists established pragmatic relationships with cities and regions by resisting the sharp simplifications of modern functionalism, integrating landscape and environmental conditions into architecture [21].

William Curtis (1985) equates the concepts of regionalism and identity and defines these concepts as a cultural phenomenon. Curtis states that modernism and tradition have been misunderstood, actually that modernism stems from tradition, and defines regionalism as researching the past's formal and social structures and transforming them according to today's social conditions [22].

Kenneth Frampton's critical regionalism paradigm developed in 1983 was inspired by the understanding of regionalism that has developed since the eighteenth century. Frampton (2016) presented an alternative to modernism's universalist understanding, particularly taking as a basis Alvar Aalto and Frank Lloyd Wright's emphasis on local identity, harmony with nature, and social context [16].

2.2. Kenneth Frampton: Critical Regionalism

Regionalism in architecture refers to consideration of the cultural, social, and environmental characteristics of the place where a building is located in its design [23]. This concept emphasizes that architecture is not only an aesthetic expression but also a social structure. Rapoport (1990) foregrounds the social, economic, and political

dimensions of regionalism, arguing that the continuity of strong cultural orders depends on tradition-oriented conservatism [24]. Critical regionalism, differing from regionalism, attempts to establish a balance between empathy and abstraction while empathizing with the traditional [25].

Tzonis and Lefaivre (1981) introduced the concept of "critical regionalism" to the literature in the early 1980s, presenting the idea of balancing universal modernism with local identities. In their 1981 work, they advocated that architecture should establish a balance between universalism and locality, demonstrating ways to harmoniously combine modernist design principles with local cultural characteristics [26]. Developing their theory, they emphasized that architecture's response to global modernity in harmony with local culture, environment, and history is not a stylistic but an ethical and political stance [27]. Kenneth Frampton enriches and disseminates this discussion in the same years [28]. These works formed the source for Frampton's theory, but Frampton advocated that good architecture should be local while avoiding pure locality, avoiding provincialism and cultural chauvinism.

Frampton's critical regionalism framework has matured over time, starting from intellectual foundations. In his 1974 article "On Reading Heidegger," starting from Heidegger's thoughts on space and existence, he emphasized that architecture is an ontological relationship humans establish with their environment [29]. This foundation prepared the ground for him to develop an alternative architectural discourse to modernism's universalist approach in his 1983 works [23]. In his article "Ten Points on Critical Regionalism," he systematized this concept, presenting ten fundamental principles for how architects can create a distinctive, local, and contextual language in the face of globalization [1].

Frampton's intellectual infrastructure is read through three fundamentals. The first is the Heideggerian phenomenological approach that relates architecture to human experience. Here, the concept of "place" is addressed as a cultural, historical, and sensory wholeness beyond physical dimension. The second is the dialectical approach that advocates not the conflict but the synthesis of local identities with global technological progress. Frampton, influenced by Paul Ricoeur's dialectic of "universal civilization and local culture," proposed that a new architectural language can be created by combining modern techniques with local materials [30, 16]. The third is positioning architecture as a tool of resistance against the homogenizing effects of the capitalist system under the influence of the Frankfurt School's critical theory [31].

In this context, Frampton proposes architecture as a sustainable practice, focusing on environmental concerns rather than style and aesthetic representations, and aiming to increase social participation by encouraging the use of local materials and labor. Frampton created ten criteria reflecting his critical regionalism thought. These principles discuss how to relate architecture based on local contextual conditions and human experience with contemporary architecture.

2.3. Defining Cultural Identity through Critical Regionalism

The definition of cultural identity in architecture within the Critical Regionalism framework is not merely a visual repetition of traditional forms but a conscious synthesis of the conflict between universality and local culture and a "resistance strategy." According to Frampton, cultural identity is constructed by reinterpreting the unique qualities of place with modern techniques against the standardization brought by global modernization and the superficiality of consumer culture.

Cultural identity, in this framework, is addressed as a concept beyond "style" or aesthetic representations. Frampton explicitly states: "Critical regionalism should, in my view, lie beyond style. It should devote itself in the last analysis to establishment of bounded domains and tactile presences with which to resist the dissolution of the late-modern world" [1].

In this framework, cultural identity is an ethical and aesthetic stance regarding "how to exist" in the modern world. Below, based on Frampton's texts, this definition is detailed under three main analytical headings.

a. Formal and Physical Dimension: This dimension examines how cultural identity is tectonic through the building's concrete existence, material, and relationship established with the senses:

Tectonic expression versus scenographic decoration: In critical regionalism, cultural identity is not a "mask" or decoration (scenography) draped over the building. Identity is hidden in the building's structural and constructional logic (tectonic). According to Frampton, the structure should honestly reveal how it resists gravity and how materials come together. "Tectonic" is the transformation of building culture into artistic expression rather than being merely a technical construction act. This approach was developed as a reaction to postmodern architecture's "tectonically vacuous, superficial" nature. Cultural identity here is understood as the expression of structural and material reality [1].

Tactile and multi-sensory experience: While the modern world and media culture reduce architecture to an image appealing only to the eye, cultural identity must appeal to all senses. Frampton argues that a significant part of cultural identity is experienced through the material's texture, temperature, smell, acoustics, and the body's movement in space (tactility). For example, in Alvar Aalto's buildings, the texture of brick or the warmth of wood creates a culturally "belonging" feeling specific to that place [1, 16].

Climatic features: Against universal technology's (air conditioning, artificial lighting) homogenization of everywhere, cultural identity is formed by incorporating local light and climate into the building. Windows and openings are not merely holes but tools that bring in that region's light and establish cultural atmosphere. Preferring passive systems (for example, courtyard use) instead of artificial climatization is a physical connection established with local culture. Instead of artificial equipment, strategies such as providing natural shading, allowing natural ventilation, and being warmer in winter and cooler in summer through enclosed courtyards are proposed. This approach demonstrates the need to balance the techniques of universal civilization with climatically influenced rooted forms of culture [1].

b. Conceptual Dimension: This dimension contains the philosophical and strategic stance in the architect's approach to cultural identity:

Dialectic between local and universal: Frampton, quoting from Paul Ricoeur, defines the fundamental problem as follows: How to be modern and return to sources? Cultural identity is not the rejection of universal civilization (technology, economy, rationality); it is the hybridization of these universal tools by filtering them through the lens of local culture (myth, history, ethics). The aim is to make universal modernism place-specific by deconstructing it with local values [1, 16].

Critical approach beyond the vernacular: Cultural identity is not a simple imitation or nostalgic repetition of vernacular architecture. Critical Regionalism addresses local values with "critical" consciousness. Vernacular forms are confronted with modern world realities to produce a "new and contemporary" identity. According to Frampton, this should be a "resistance architecture" rather than being used as a populist communication tool [1].

Resistance against globalization: Critical regionalism positions cultural identity as a tool of resistance against multinational corporations' hegemonic power, optimization logic, and architecture reduced to providing an aesthetic shell to facilitate marketing a large commodity [1]. Frampton warns about the relative indifference of multinational conglomerates to the welfare of the society in which they are based: "Under their hegemony, patriotism is transformed into an absurdity and regional differentiation is a factor to be eliminated" [1].

c. Contextual Dimension: This dimension analyzes the "place"-centered relationship the building establishes with its physical environment, geography, and history:

Place creation and space: According to Heidegger, "the boundary is not the line at which something stops, but rather the contour within which something begins its 'presencing'" [1, 29]. Based on Heidegger's distinction between "Raum" (place with defined boundaries) and "Spatium" (infinite space), Frampton opposes modern megalopolises' "placelessness." Cultural identity is possible by creating a "Place" with defined boundaries, human scale, and psychologically "inhabitable" (dwelling). Against the megalopolis's chaos, the building must create an "enclave" (protected zone) within itself [16].

Topography and typology: In the relationship between typology and topography, Frampton defines typology as a concept belonging to both local culture and the universal, representing diversity in architectural program, while

he explains topography as a character entirely specific to place [16]. Cultural identity is embodied in the relationship the building establishes with the land. The reason for this lies in its continuous emergence throughout local architectural history. Rather than flattening the land completely and placing a universal box on it, it is necessary to "embed" the building into topography, "step" it, and integrate it with the land. As Mario Botta said, "constructing the place" means incorporating that geography's geological and historical layers into architecture [1].

Political and social realm: Contextual identity is also political. Referring to Hannah Arendt, Frampton states that creating public spaces where "people appear together visible" is a prerequisite for cultural and political power. Against modern planning's "placeless" constructions, architecture should present a physical gathering and encounter space [16].

3. Findings: Quests for Cultural Identity in Turkish Architecture

As one of the fundamental means of expression reflecting societies' cultural identity, architecture has witnessed a continuous quest for "cultural identity" in twentieth-century Turkish architecture. This process has been shaped by the nature of the relationship established with the past, Westernization movements, and national identity definitions through profound social transformations from the Ottoman Empire's final periods to the founding of the Republic. In the Republic's early years (1923-1930), quests for national identity began in line with goals of breaking from the Ottoman past and integrating with the West [32]. As Bozdoğan (2002) shows in the Turkish example, architecture was a fundamental tool in constructing national identity during the early Republican period. According to Bozdoğan, at that time, reflecting the Kemalist understanding, they focused on the concept of "national" architecture rather than "regional." The local and "sub-national" affiliations contained in regionalism contradicted the nation-state's aim of uniting in a single ideal. During this period, most Turkish architects undertook the task of fixing the nation's identity with recognizable architectural forms [32].

During the 1923-1950 period, westernization and modernization ideals were prominent. Although regionalism appeared symbolic with the use of local architectural elements in efforts to reflect national identity, it remained at a symbolic level. New buildings under the "National Architecture Movement" began to be discussed, but this architectural understanding of the Committee of Union and Progress, seeking East-West synthesis and bearing Islamic symbols, did not satisfy Republicans seeking definitive Westernization [33, 34]. According to Hasol (2020), after Atatürk's death, the idea of returning to the old became more dominant in Second National Architecture, and after the 1970s, it developed as a style research based on finding and using local architectural elements from the past [35]. Sedat Hakkı Eldem argued that local architecture was not the same as national architecture and prioritized public buildings as symbols of state power rather than traditional houses. Although the "Turkish house" concept had limited influence, the idea of "national expression" in public buildings emerged in the early 1940s [36].

After 1950, with international rationalism coming to the fore, architects like Turgut Cansever developed critical modernism. In the post-1960 period, regionalism in Turkey transformed into a more conscious and systematic approach. Criticism of modernism intensified, and local identity and cultural continuity were incorporated into architectural discourse. Kuban stated that regionalism resisted architecture's stereotyping as a reaction to the International Style and emphasized its critical nature with definitions such as "not imitation of regional forms" and "not creation based on the old" [37]. Erkol (2016) states that during this period, approaches such as brutalism and critical regionalism opposing modern architecture's sterile and universalist approach were associated with architectural production in Turkey [38]. According to Balamir, loyalty to the style of architectural modernism diversified until the end of the 1970s, shifting from international style to organic architecture, new regionalism, and brutalism [39].

From the 1980s to the present, as globalization's effects increased, architects in Turkey began to evaluate local and global approaches together. Frampton's concept of "critical regionalism" influenced architectural discussions in Turkey, and regionalism discourse was reconsidered with a more systematic and critical perspective. Balamir notes that during this period, concepts of "identity loss" or "identityless environments" emerged. While the first group of views brought regionalist, nationalist styles based on accepting an unchanging cultural identity to the agenda, the second group presented a stance open to new identities by focusing on contemporaneity and

originality [39, 40]. In the following lines, the structures of two important architects opposing this identity loss from successive generations are examined in more detail.

3.1. Turgut Cansever

Turgut Cansever views architecture as an expression of the effort to make sense of human existence, culture, and the relationship with the environment and moral responsibility on earth. The understanding of tawhid (unity) nourished by Islamic thought forms the foundation of his architectural approach. At the same time, this thought shapes the unity of form and meaning in his works. For Cansever, architecture becomes distinctive by moving away from superficial solutions of imported discourses and deeply interpreting local culture and historical accumulation [41]. Düzenli (2019) addresses Cansever's architectural design sources in two parts: preferences coming from concepts and preferences directly reflected in form. She determines the sources of his formal preferences as modern and postmodern architectural movements on one hand and both monumental and civil architecture of the Seljuk and Ottoman periods on the other. Together with these, the conceptually-driven section of his architecture is classified into three subsections: existential belonging based on human foundations, Islamic belief foundations, and Islamic and human attitudes, as well as historical belonging and geographical belonging [42].

Considered to have an architectural language appropriate to Bodrum's housing tradition in this project, Cansever paid attention to ensuring that values and behaviors such as composition, respect for natural laws, simplicity, clarity, and neighborhood relations that he advanced in the Ertegün House and other works are manifested in architecture [41]. The Demir Houses (1983), deemed worthy of the Aga Khan Architecture Award, is accepted as a masterpiece where he transforms this philosophical infrastructure into a concrete spatial experience and produces responses to how cultural identity and continuity can be ensured.

3.1.1. Formal and Physical Level: Material and Tectonic Synthesis in Organic Texture

The fundamental characteristic defining the physical existence of Demir Houses was revealed through utilization of the region's opportunities. By adapting to the descending topography toward the sea, it forms an organic settlement texture (Fig. 1). Additionally, the role of stone and the stonemason in a building's identity was valued. Besides subjects such as construction techniques and production systems, the balance between "artisanal contribution" and "prefabrication" was also examined. The project positions each housing unit without changing the existing land slope and natural structure so as not to obstruct each other's views and to best benefit from sunlight. This approach creates streets and squares that intersect at various angles and offer diverse perspectives, resembling a village texture that has formed spontaneously over time rather than a standard modern architectural grid (Fig. 2). Although the buildings settling on this sloping land may seem similar to each other schematically at first glance, they evoke traditional settlements in terms of both their dimensions and irregular positioning. Although the project uses standardized architectural elements (windows, doors, etc.), it diversifies with different plan schemes, floor heights, and mass articulations. This situation reflects what can be defined as Cansever's design strategy of "diversity formed by similarities" [41].



Figure 1: External views showing Demir Holiday Houses positioned according to slope and intertwined with nature [43].



Figure 2: Houses in the project were designed to face the sea [44].

The project's tectonic expression is based on a conscious and harmonic synthesis of local and modern materials. The main load-bearing walls were constructed by local craftsmen using stones obtained from the region with traditional masonry techniques [41]. This choice not only gives the structure a place-specific color and texture but also ensures it takes root in place as a production culture by combining local construction techniques with concrete (Fig. 3). Cansever transforms the past's accumulation into a contemporary tectonic expression by combining these traditional stone walls with exposed concrete lintels, jambs, and arches [41]. This synthesis enables the structure to carry both the weight and naturalness of traditional architecture and to have modern architecture's pure and clear geometric language.



Figure 3: Details of concrete and stone combination in Demir Houses project [42].

Here tactility is constructed through the nakedness of material and structural reality. The structures' stone walls were left unplastered, bringing the material's natural texture and roughness to the fore. The surface characteristics of this stone have been enriched with different masonry techniques, and the material has emerged with different expressions in each structure.

The project's response to Bodrum's hot Mediterranean climate is shaped through passive design strategies and contemporary interpretation of local knowledge systems. The structures' fifty-centimeter-thick stone walls provide a solution appropriate to the region's hot climate with high thermal insulation values.

3.1.2. Conceptual Level: Living Tradition

Cansever (1981) defines humanity's fundamental task as beautifying the world by showing respect to existence and argues that architecture makes it possible to perceive all-encompassing unity. This requires reevaluation of ecopolitical life, administrative institutions, and technology, replacing aristocratic and technocratic orientations with an order where everyone accepts their responsibility. Beauty is conceptualized as submission to existence's

commands and perfection of what needs to be done, emphasizing that man-made beauty reflects the limits of human knowledge and understanding [45]. Moreover, the fundamental approach has been to develop solutions for the future by proceeding not from form-based tradition but from the essence that enables tradition's formation, cultural content, belief system, and historical experience [46]. Many of Cansever's discourses contain emphasis on benefiting from historical experience. The structure's material, form, load-bearing system, distribution scheme with topography, plan and type diversity are evidence that historical experience has been considered [47]. Cansever created his structures by evaluating geographical and historical factors. According to Gür (2024), Cansever used some motifs reminiscent of the nearly endogenous architectural style created by geography to underline the place's existence and history [48].

The formal and tectonic decisions of Demir Houses are reflections of fundamental concepts in Cansever's intellectual world. The most fundamental conceptual framework of the project is constituted by "ornamentation" [49]. "Artisanal contribution" and "style, formal expression" [46] among the project's objectives indicate an aesthetic quest based on local and manual labor, enriching rather than opposing modernism's simplification tendency. This concept, beyond simple decoration, defines bringing together all elements constituting a structure (structure, material, light, space organization) in a wholeness, expressing existential meaning [24, 49]. In Demir Houses, ornamentation manifests itself in the unity of stone texture with concrete smoothness, in the silhouette created by masses settling onto topography, and in each window's manner of framing the view (Fig. 4). Each part of the structure serves the whole, namely Cansever's philosophy of "wholeness of existence," both functionally and semantically.



Figure 4: Silhouette created by concrete and stone in Demir Houses project [41, 42].

The project's organic settlement plan harbors a fundamental critique of modern city's functionalist and schematic planning understanding and reinterpretation of traditional Aegean village texture. When examining this characteristic of the project, it is understood that it is not a form imitation but reproduction of fundamental principles forming that texture_ human scale, social interaction, respect for climate and topography_ in a contemporary context. Cansever addresses the past "by developing solutions for the future, proceeding from the essence, cultural content, and belief system that constitute it" [41]. This approach carries his architecture to an understanding that sees culture as a living and dynamic entity.

In Demir Holiday Village, conscious locality versus the vernacular constitutes a concrete example of Frampton's concept of critical reinterpretation. Cansever has not directly copied traditional Bodrum architecture but interpreted its logic. This approach, conceptualized by Köksal as "thought-out spontaneity," reveals the project's distance from the vernacular. In Cansever's Demir Holiday Village, there appears to be spontaneity as if formed in the past, but this spontaneity has been consciously created, it is "thought-out spontaneity." With the production of nine different building types and the coming together of these building types in parcels of different shapes (Fig. 5), at different angles, in ways to provide different neighborhood relations, the settlement is rescued from ordinariness and an organic order is observed [50].

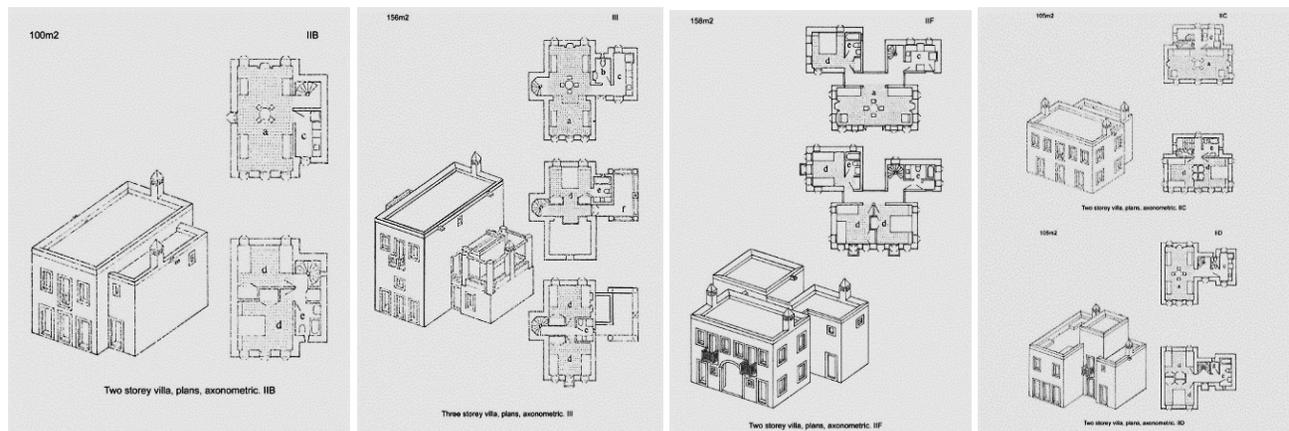


Figure 5: House types in Demir Houses project [44].

Cansever's resistance strategy in Demir Holiday Village is displayed in the shaping of the structure. In 1991, Cansever expressed the design's purpose as "testing values and design methods belonging to completely lost local urban design and architectural culture" [51]. In this context, the project is positioned as a stance against modern architecture's universal but placeless, homeless architecture. In Tanyeli's definition, the project is "a practical objection made to modern urbanism" [52]. Against modernism's top-down deterministic, geometric, static, and imposing attitude, Cansever proposes an organic, participatory, and place-specific alternative.

3.1.3. Cultural and Contextual Level: A Critical Alternative to Modernism

Demir Houses is positioned as a cultural perspective and alternative to widespread holiday housing production in Turkey during the period it was built (1987). Against standardized, context-disconnected, and identityless reinforced concrete construction rapidly spreading in coastal regions in those years, Demir Houses proposes a model rooted in place and culture. Cansever's completion of the Ertegun House restoration (1971-1973) in Bodrum before the project shows that he learned by deeply experiencing local architecture, construction techniques, and spatial spirit. As Cansever says, it was developed with the philosophy that "it is obvious that any approach that does not consider the wholeness of existence cannot reach a solution" [46]. This project presents a strategic alternative against modernist urbanization's "housing silos," machine-culture, and universal standard impositions.

The project proves that cultural identity and continuity can be ensured through a methodology built on understanding fundamental principles behind architectural tradition and recreating these principles in today's conditions, avoiding formal imitation. The abandonment of the project's initial brutalist version and the realization of the final project integrated with topography and local culture ten years later is the most concrete evidence of this learning process and context-sensitive rational decision-making mechanism. By recoding local ethical codes (neighborhood, craftsmanship, relationship with nature) against universal modernist codes, the building's form is read as a language of criticism. Thus, it constructs a critical discourse against modernism through local history, neighborhood norms, and environmental wholeness.

The fact that Demir Holiday Village was designed as a gated community reminds one of Frampton's criterion of "bounded domain." Although Cansever designed Demir Holiday Village as a neighborhood prototype, the settlement is positioned as a "Holiday Village" and shows limited permeability to the outside world [51]. This closed structure can be evaluated as one of the examples of the gated community typology developing in Turkey in the 1980s. The streets, squares, and common areas within the site create a micro-city impression, but this city is isolated from the surrounding Bodrum texture.

In conclusion, Demir Houses is a reflection of Cansever's ethical and metaphysical stance viewing architecture as humanity's "duty to beautify the world" [53]. Cansever (1997) advocates an architectural approach respectful of nature with small-scale structures. By regulating each house's relationship with its neighbor, he placed structures on the land. He acts with the principle "small is beautiful." By proceeding from human spiritual world, he balances

tranquility and movement; he designed with values of modesty, reserve, and naturalness. With the widespread adoption of this systematic approach, he believes that architectural success similar to what Ottoman masters and great Asian builders achieved in history is possible in Turkey [49].

3.2. Nevzat Sayın

Nevzat Sayın, unlike Turgut Cansever, does not establish cultural identity and continuity in contemporary Turkish architecture from a transcendent religious and philosophical foundation. His architectural approach emerges as an original interpretation of critical regionalism that accepts "place" itself as the primary source of knowledge and meaning. Sayın's relationship with the past is built on ensuring cultural continuity "by seeking ways to do as has been done" and "by finding something 'new' from within habits" [54]. The Yahşibey Houses project, a holistic example of this approach, presents a concrete model for how a place's cultural memory and identity can be carried to the future.

Here Sayın states that to understand the value of old and new architectural objects, it is necessary to comprehend "how they are made." Sayın (2025) argues that the making knowledge and detail culture of past architectural tradition should be transferred to contemporary architectural practice. This transfer occurs not only through formal reference but through understanding and reinterpreting tectonic knowledge and craftsmanship tradition extending from ancient times to Bauhaus. Comprehending "how" architectural objects "are made" enables both preservation of past values and provision of social consensus in current design processes. This approach positions architectural space design as a "situation design" practice carrying cultural continuity and collective memory [55].

3.2.1. Formal and Physical Level: Tectonics and Morphology Arising from the Land

Nevzat Sayın (2024), when explaining his own architecture, states that "place" and "program" are the most important determinants for him and explains that the concept of "place" stands most forward [56]. Sayın (2021), in his book describing Yahşibey Houses' design and construction process, emphasizes that by looking at existing houses, they followed their path. Sayın explains this situation thus: "The structure that emerged at the end of the work we started to make a house here had almost become an improved enlargement of the small, dilapidated structure that previously existed there" [57]. The most fundamental principle defining Yahşibey Houses' physical existence is its use of both concrete and abstract sources of place. The project's main construction material, stone, was largely obtained from foundation excavation and the land itself. The use of material in its raw and pure state, without being covered with another cladding, enables the structure to become an extension of its geological and visual soil. This situation brings the structure's tactile qualities to the fore, establishing a direct connection with the place's spirit. The physical configuration shows complete harmony with the village's existing texture and topography. Like Cansever's Demir Houses project, the structures were placed on the slope, their eastern facades largely left solid to protect from prevailing winds, while their western facades facing the sea view were designed with wide and transparent surfaces [57]. The "inward-oriented" planning understanding of traditional houses, which creates solid and protected facades toward the street and directs life to a private garden, constitutes the fundamental morphology of the designs (Fig. 6). However, this traditional schema has been physically reinterpreted by combining with modern elements such as open plan organization, gallery voids, and wide glass surfaces in interior spaces [57].

Here the structure's tectonics is built on the differentiation between old and new. As if considering Frampton's scenography warning, newly added steel and reinforced concrete elements do not mimic or imitate the old stone wall. This application shows that local material tradition is not dogmatic but rationally questionable. New roof or slab creates distinct lines between them without loading the old wall, not hiding connection details. Thus, "how the structure stands" and which part belongs to which time is honestly displayed.

Here it is observed that beyond and within the project's structural and concrete geographical features, villagers' lifestyles and views of the world are considered. Indeed, Sayın (2021) discusses the problems of villagers' and villagers' disappearance, speaking of a human type from villagers who, with their nature-bound lives, are patient, not greedy, content with little [57]. Sayın's Yahşibey residences combine traditional settlement logic with

modern interpretation. In examples such as Emre Senan Design Foundation, the approach of appearing single-story from the street facade and not obstructing other residences' views constitutes a concrete indication of reconciling respect for place's natural data with contemporary spatial needs [59].



Figure 6: Views of Yahşibey houses and Emre Senan House [58].

3.2.2. Conceptual and Associative Level: Dialectic between "Familiar" and "New"

The project's conceptual power lies, in the architect's own expression, in the fact that the emerging structure simultaneously evokes the feeling of being both "like our houses" (familiar) and "not like our houses" (new) [59]. This dilemma shows that cultural continuity is not a static preservation act but a living and transforming dialectical process [60]. Indeed, in the 5th-6th House examples, at villagers' suggestion, plastered brick walls were used instead of the stone material in other houses [56]. The "familiar" manifests itself in the local stone used, solid walls closed to the street, and settlement logic respectful of topography. The "new" emerges in facades generously open to the view contrary to tradition, in fluid and bright interior spaces, and in bringing material together with modern details (Fig. 7).

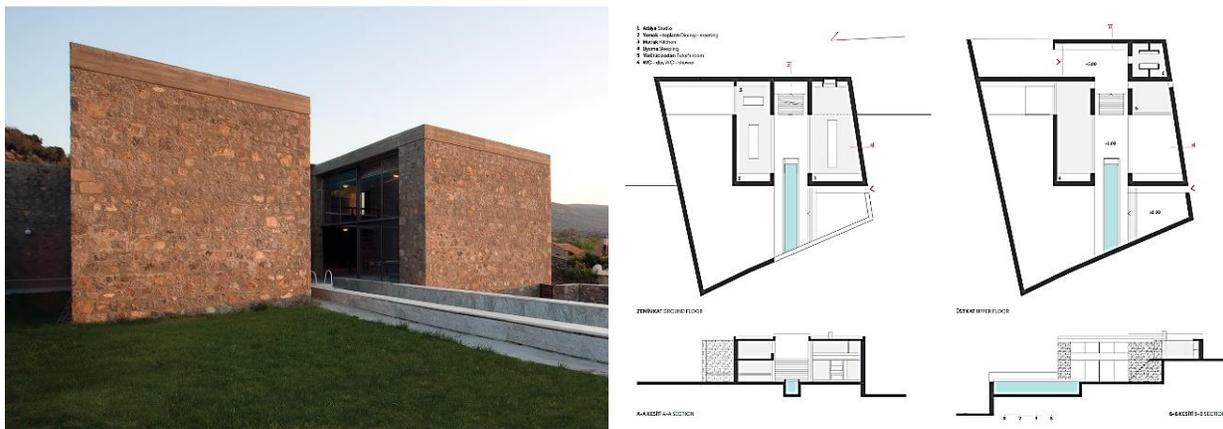


Figure 7: Inward-oriented transparent facade and plans of Emre Senan House in Yahşibey [58].

Sayın uses the old as rational data without romanticizing it. Rather than formally copying traditional forms and materials, he establishes "critical" distance with locality by using modern prismatic masses. Thus a contemporary architectural product belonging to today emerges. He establishes not so much a synthesis between old and new but a critical dialogue where both maintain their existence. In the 5th House example, he has provided harmony rather than tension between functional program and formal solution by combining traditional forms' courtyard and space organization with the "openness" and functional flexibility required by modern life. The principle "hitting the stream's bird with the stream's stone"¹ is not only a practical method but a powerful conceptual

¹A Turkish proverb meaning "to accomplish something by using the other party's own resources," that is, to achieve one's aim by drawing upon the very means available within the situation itself.

metaphor that architecture should emerge from its own context [61]. However, whether the decision to place large openings is compatible with this context's structural tradition, cultural environment, and climatic conditions is the subject of another research.

3.2.3. Cultural and Contextual Level: Criticism and Ethics of Belonging to Place

The Yahşibey project presents a cultural critique contrary to place-disconnected and standardized architectural productions widespread in Turkey's rural and historical textures. Sayın's desire to "not be seen, to disappear" and "to appear ordinary from among the ordinary" expresses the effort for the new structure to become part of it by avoiding displaying a dominant character within the existing texture [61]. At the same time, it also reveals its own difference. Especially concrete structures framing stone facades like lintels and sometimes constituting the entire wall show this different identity (Fig. 8). This attitude reinforces the idea that architecture is part of the place and society to which it belongs rather than being an individual means of expression and points to the collective consciousness underlying cultural continuity. The dialogue and collaboration established with local craftsmen during the construction process ensures not only preservation of traditional construction culture and craft but also reproduction with contemporary interpretation through simple interventions to traditional construction methods, keeping them alive and also enabling craftsmen's development [61, 56].



Figure 8: External walls made with concrete instead of stone differently from other houses in some houses in Yahşibey village [56].

In the 4th House example, privacy as a cultural value shapes the design. In this example, by utilizing the land structure, one reaches a room on the garden floor by descending half a floor from the entrance floor and a room with a balcony by ascending half a floor (Fig. 9). Thus, with bedrooms and common areas facing different directions, privacy has been provided among those using the same house [56]. Therefore, the project proves that architecture is not an action meeting shelter needs but a meaningful intervention carrying a place's cultural memory and identity to the future. Sayın's methodology shows that it is possible to transform traditional values into living and developing cultural practices rather than preserving them as museum objects.

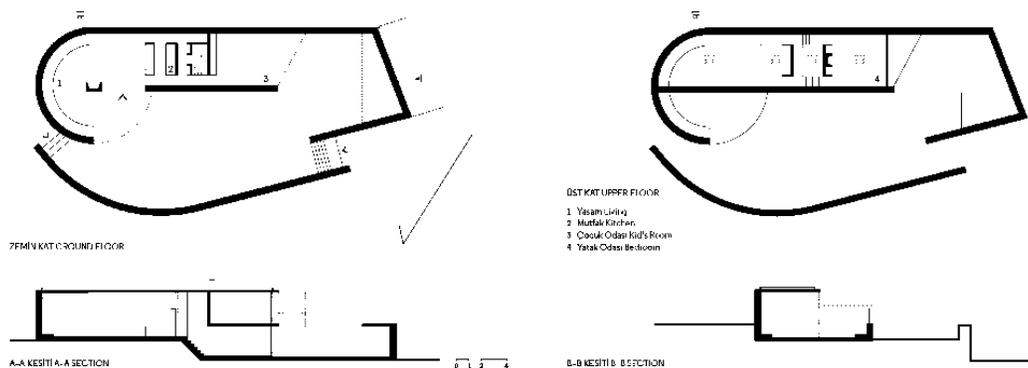


Figure 9: Plans and sections of 4th House in Yahşibey [56].

Table 1 compares Turgut Cansever's Demir Holiday Village and Nevzat Sayın's Yahşibey Structures using Kenneth Frampton's critical regionalism framework to evaluate how they mediate between universal civilization and local culture. The analysis is structured around three dimensions: contextual engagement with topography and socio-political realms, formal and physical expressions of culture through tectonics and climate, and conceptual resistance to globalization alongside views on vernacular architecture. Ultimately, this framework reveals divergent yet complementary approaches to achieving cultural continuity in contemporary Turkish architecture. While Cansever emphasizes organic wholeness rooted in Islamic metaphysics, Sayın prioritizes a phenomenological dialogue between the old and the new, with both offering mutually enriching models for integrating regional identity into modern practice.

Table 1: Comparative analysis table: Evaluation of Turgut Cansever's and Nevzat Sayın's exemplary structures within the framework of critical regionalism.

| Analysis Dimension | Frampton's Theoretical Reference | Turgut Cansever (Demir Holiday Village, Bodrum) | Nevzat Sayın (Yahşibey Buildings, Izmir, Dikili) |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1. Contextual dimension | | | |
| Topography and place-form | Frampton opposes modernism's leveling attitude toward land, advocating that the building be "embedded" into topography and integrated with the terrain. | Organic settlement: The structure is positioned by fragmenting according to the olive trees and natural slope on the land. Rather than a hotel block, a settlement texture spreading across topography has been produced. | Following existing traces: The structure came into being without flattening the land, by preserving the traces of existing ruins and stone walls, through "articulating" a new life into them. |
| Boundary | Referring to Heidegger; identity is formed not in infinite space but in a "place" with defined boundaries that gives a sense of presence. | Privacy configuration: An inward-oriented "neighborhood" atmosphere has been created with courtyards, stone walls, and narrow streets. | Place within the shell: However, physical boundaries (walls, fences) between structures have been minimized, softening private property boundaries to construct a collective natural landscape perception. |
| Political and social realm | Frampton, referring to Hannah Arendt, advocates that architecture should create political/public spaces where people come together. | Reviving the neighborhood concept: Although the project consists of individual accommodation units, it forces users to see each other and interact by producing squares. Additionally, it is a holiday home for the high-income group and does not establish direct relationship with the local community. | Pedagogical "Agora": The structures create a "collective production" space by functioning as a summer school/workshop. In accordance with Frampton's emphasis on "schools" and cultural production centers, this is an intellectual gathering place in the countryside, but this too is a demand of a certain socio-economic class. |
| 2. Formal and physical dimension | | | |
| Tectonic expression | Structural honesty and legibility: Architecture is not decoration; it is the poetic expression of the building's load transfer and connection details. | Weight and mass: stone, reminiscent of local structures, is a massive element that makes the building's "weight" felt. Here the unity of reinforced concrete skeleton and stone wall is exhibited. | Material differentiation: Newly added exposed concrete is separated from the old stone wall, revealing their own tectonic existences in a pure manner. Thus the boundaries between old and new become clear. |
| Tactility | While appealing to the eye, appealing to all senses through texture, smell, and material sensation. | Material phenomenology: The rough surface of coarse-cut stone and the texture of wooden shutters evoke in the user a bodily sense of space beyond the visual. | Texture of contrast: The contrast between smooth industrial concrete and rough local stone strengthens the tactile experience. The user touches history and today simultaneously. |
| Climatic response | Establishing passive relationship with local climatic data (wind, light) against mechanical ventilation systems. | Passive climatization: Cooling has been provided using orientation suitable for natural ventilation, wind corridors, and stone's thermal mass. | Semi-open spaces: Appropriate to the Aegean climate, the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces have been blurred, based on natural ventilation. The strategy of embedding in the earth naturally increases buildings' thermal insulation. |

Table 1 (contd....)

| Analysis Dimension | Frampton's Theoretical Reference | Turgut Cansever (Demir Holiday Village, Bodrum) | Nevzat Sayın (Yaşibey Buildings, Izmir, Dikili) |
|--|---|--|--|
| 3. Conceptual dimension | | | |
| Culture and civilization synthesis | Hybrid synthesis arising from the conflict between universal technique and local culture. | Wise modernism: Claims to synthesize the wisdom tradition of Turkish-Islamic culture with modern architectural practice. Cansever's discourse is based on emphasis on "return"; Frampton, however, wants "forward-looking interpretation." | Local-Modern dialogue: Exhibits Frampton's "arrière-garde" stance by combining universal construction technology (concrete construction) with local craft culture (stone masonry). Cultural identity is constructed through "absence" and "silence." |
| Resistance strategy | Resistance against consumer culture and false historicism. | Typological resistance: Rejects the "5-star hotel" typology imposed by the tourism industry and consumption-oriented architecture; instead proposes a "living environment" at human scale. | Resistance to nostalgia: Rejects the false vernacular understanding that romanticizes the village house. Revives local architecture against ostentation and with a contemporary "design school" function. |
| Conscious locality versus the vernacular | Frampton emphasizes that regionalism is not "sentimental vernacular." Identity is conscious and critical reproduction; not nostalgia. | Intellectual vernacular: It does not imitate a "Bodrum village"; it consciously reconfigures the village's social and spatial relationships (neighborhood, street) for a modern holiday program. | Distant locality: In Yaşibey, the "old house" is accepted as it is, and the modern life placed into it looks at the local from a critical distance. There is no imitation, there is dialogue. |

4. Conclusion and Evaluation

This research examined the quest for cultural identity in contemporary Turkish architecture through the works of Turgut Cansever and Nevzat Sayın within the framework of Frampton's critical regionalism theory. The strategy of "mediating the impact of universal civilization with elements_ indirectly_ derived from the peculiarities of a particular place" [1] expressed in Frampton's critical regionalism theory constitutes the common goal of both architects. However, this common quest has been embodied through different theoretical foundations and methodological approaches. Within the framework of Frampton's critical regionalism theory, Turgut Cansever and Nevzat Sayın are positioned at different points of the spectrum through the examples here. Turgut Cansever and Nevzat Sayın both work in the Aegean Region's characteristic topography, but their approaches to this topography show fundamental differences. Cansever is close to the vernacular pole; representing traditional forms, materials, and spatial logic, he emphasizes cultural continuity. Sayın is close to the universal modernism pole; reinterpreting minimalist language and industrial materials in topographical context, he produces place-specific architecture.

Cansever's strategy develops around the concept of "Tawhid" built on a metaphysical thought system nourished by Islamic thought. Positioning architecture as a tool of moral responsibility with the understanding of Tawhid, Cansever adopts an organic design approach within the wholeness of existence layers. This approach observed in the Demir Houses building example has caused the formation of a wholeness by synthesizing local materials and construction techniques with modern technologies (concrete), addressing cultural continuity simultaneously at physical and spiritual dimensions. This locality is not limited to the use of bay windows, chimneys, and fireplaces; in Gür's (2024) words, Cansever used local stone types to establish a sense of locality and feel valuable memories from the past rather than cutting trees [48].

Sayın's methodology is built on the strategy of "doing as has been done" [54] proceeding from place itself. In Korkmaz's (2025) words, the common strategies in Sayın's architectural structures are that all of them are reconciliation of what should be with the existing (physical, cultural, historical) in different ways in context. Making place's physical and cultural layers the basic input of the design process with his phenomenological approach centering contextual sensitivity, Sayın develops a position that blends minimalist aesthetics with local values and criticizes ego-centered architectural approaches with the desire to "not be seen, to disappear" [60]. This method establishes cultural continuity reflected in the structure-place relationship's production process. Thus works both become part of local collective memory and exhibit new aesthetic-tectonic characteristics derived from place itself.

The most striking feature in Yahşibey residences is the delicate balance in both harmony and tension it establishes with its context. However, here the exposed concrete and industrial steel Sayın uses do not establish an organic connection with local Aegean construction culture. While Cansever uses concrete symbolically, Sayın does not hesitate to make exposed concrete walls in large volumes.

Common approaches among the examined architects reveal the fundamental paradigm in contemporary Turkish architecture's quest for cultural identity. The strategy of understanding fundamental principles behind traditional architecture and reinterpreting them in contemporary context, avoiding formal imitation, constitutes the methodological framework adopted by all three architects. The typological abstraction approach involves comprehending traditional spatial configurations at an abstract level and reorganizing them with contemporary functions. Cansever focuses on internalizing traditional principles and transforming them into production practice, while Sayın—like Cengiz Bektaş—focuses on contextual integration in the place-material-craftsmanship triangle. The hybrid tectonic understanding encompasses their approaches harmonizing local materials and construction techniques with modern structural systems.

The cultural identity continuity strategies of the examined architects are shaped around the quest to resolve the difference between universal values brought by the modernization process and local cultural identity. However, based on the examples given, the architects' methodological differences emerge at scalar, theoretical, and temporal dimensions. Cansever tried to develop organic approaches at both residential and public scales, while Sayın realized contextual interventions at residential scale. In terms of theoretical foundations, Cansever relies on metaphysical thought systems, while Sayın depends on phenomenological and contextual analysis. In terms of time relationship, Cansever exhibits approaches of keeping the spirit of the past alive in contemporary context, while Sayın establishes dynamic balance between past and present.

Generally, cultural identity continuity in contemporary Turkish architecture is addressed on the axis of context-based spatial arrangements, material use, and construction techniques. Balanced combination of these approaches presents different approaches of architectural structure examples. Cansever's and Sayın's works also exemplify these two main approaches. In conclusion, while Cansever's and Sayın's works present different methods for how cultural identity can be produced in modern Turkish architecture, they offer complementary models. When each of these models is related to Frampton's critical regionalism criteria, it emerges that architectural practice requires interdisciplinary consistency in both theoretical and production axes. The research findings emphasize the importance of strengthening typology reading in design processes, reorganizing construction-craft relationships, and addressing place-material policies at a strategic level for the future. These proposals are of a nature that will contribute both to contemporary Turkish architecture's preservation of local identity continuity and to its taking a productive position within global discourse.

This comparative analysis has shown through two examples how Kenneth Frampton's critical regionalism discourse manifests in Turkish architectural practice. Turgut Cansever's Demir Holiday Village and Nevzat Sayın's Yahşibey village structures represent different strategies of cultural identity construction. Although these projects do not meet all dimensions of Frampton's theory, they enable reinterpretation of the criteria in Frampton's theory. Thus they create proposals for future research. First, ethnographic research on user experience of these projects should be conducted. Thus differences between cultural identity "designer's intention" and "user's experience" will emerge. Second, construction processes and local economic impacts should be examined. This way how Frampton's "local craft" emphasis is realized in practice will become clear. Third, there is opportunity to evaluate these projects' position in Turkey's wider architectural culture. Thus whether critical regionalism discourse is seen only in elite projects or is also exemplified in areas such as social housing and public infrastructure will emerge.

Conflict of Interest

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