

# Impact of globalisation on architecture



## **What is meant By the Term Globalisation, and How Does It Have an Impact on the Practice Of Architecture?**

### **Introduction**

In any age of change, debates on conflicting ideologies often dominate discussions. The struggle to adapt often results in shaping the social, political, economic and cultural paradigms. In architectural context and urban designs, much has been argued on the ideology of modernism and traditionalism and, more recently, on globalism and regionalism. These ideologies have been tacitly acknowledged, yet their practices have often been considered non-conforming. To effectively argue “ for” an ideology such as globalism, one needs to take into consideration the consequences and impacts based on prevailing evidence, as well as deliberate on opposing views. In the following discussion, the researcher shall discuss globalization and its impact on architecture with reference to various architectural styles that are considered global and assert that globalization has positively affected architectural styles of the world.

### **Discussion**

Globalization is an umbrella term that refers to a complex and universal phenomenon that has affected varied dimensions including economics, politics, science, history, geography, environment, culture, management, international relations, and professional practices etc. Depending on the context it is used in, globalization can be defined as “ the growing interdependence of the world’s people ... a process integrating not just the economy but culture, technology, and governance. People everywhere are becoming connected-affected by events in far corners of the world.” United

Nations Development Program (1999: 1). From this definition, one understands that globalization is not only a phenomenon that is understood and appreciated by Western cultures but it is also fast becoming embedded in other regions of the world. Globalization has a daunting influence over almost all aspects of public and private life (Kiggundu 2002). Consequently, it is not surprising that it has also proliferated to architectural practices as well.

To understand the influence of globalization on architecture, one needs to first understand the influence of culture on architecture. According to Lewis (2002), architectural history is filled with movements of opposing cultural and aesthetic diversity, which form the basis for architectural philosophy and design ideology. This is because governments, companies and people of nations around the world are the main sponsors of architectural designs and styles, which they use to symbolize their rule and identity. Thus, the Romans developed the magnificent coliseums and temples with the view to depict their empire's grandeur (Lewis 2002). The classical Roman architectural designs points to the hegemony of its people who have been the determinism of hierarchy and values of the Roman culture (Tzonis, Lefaivre and Stagno 2001). Furthermore, one also observes that the classical Roman style of architecture depicts cultural hegemony. This trend of cultural influence over architectural design is not isolated in history. During the 19th and 20th century, to establish their identities in colonies they set up, the French and English had controlled the architectural styles of many regions of the world including China, South East Asia, Africa and America. Monumental designs, which have been developed and set in these regions, speak of their

colonial rule and changing policies. Regarding colonial cultural hegemony, Metcalf (1989 qt. Wright ) writes, “ Administrators hoped that preserving traditional status-hierarchies would buttress their own superimposed colonial order. Architects, in turn, acknowledging that resistance to new forms is often based on affections for familiar places, tried to evoke a sense of continuity with the local past in their designs.” (Wright 9) After the two World Wars, economic decline and rise of national universalism led to capitalism. European and American architects, according to Lewis (2002), rebelled against the classicism and demanded a new regime for international designs to be adopted with the new industrial, technological, social and political order; hence, emerged the modernist style.

Modernism, according to Ibelings (1998), formed the basis for building, during the post-war era. Modern architecture progressed with faith in reason. It introduced the concept of internationalization in architecture, whereby designs of offices, schools, hospitals and housing have been based on multifunction. This style, however, has been fast replaced by postmodernism in which concepts are set on universally accepted ideologies. The post-modern style has become more dominant, partly because of the deterioration of modernism and partly because modernism could not convey the language of people who inhabited buildings and houses built by modern architects. Buildings are to function as vehicles of ideas and activities within it (Ibelings 1998). They need to reflect the aesthetic and inspiration of the people who live in it. It is during this post-modern era that emerged the concept of universalism to express and accommodate symbols of

technological development, national progress, economic integration and internationalization.

As a result, during the late 20th century, a wave of architectural styles emerged that reflected the age of globalization. This international style emerged which had been synonymous with standardization, systemization, mass production, functional logic and economies of scale. The new functional type of architectural design has adopted the global culture of commerce and design.

The global architectural style triumphed over the historic classical as it is based on the rationale of universalization. The global architects argue that the stylistic buildings during the modern age surpass its classical, constructivist, modernist and colonial counterparts because it facilitates the vernacular expression and allows regional and aesthetic inspiration to integrate into designs (Umbach and Bernd 2005). The global consumers manifest their expectations and ideologies are influenced by market opportunities, business agendas, standardization, franchises, and brands. Buildings are characterized by skyscrapers, towers, malls and branded buildings. The Petronas Towers, Sears Towers, World Trade Centre, Shanghai World Financial Centre and Canary Wharf, for example, all depict consumerism and universalism. Thus, the global architectural style has come to dominate the global arena.

The global architectural style has also come to influence the architectural practice. As architect firms cater to international markets, they expand to profit from far away markets, even though the majority are based in the

Western countries. They base their designs on a general framework of globalization and post modernism. They are more influenced by the local cultures. Their designs often reflect both, the local elements and universal designs. Oriental buildings, for example, are often based on Feng Shui principles, even though the monument is based on technological and modern architecture. Similarly, high-rise buildings in the US will have used glass, stainless steel and such metals, which depict the nation's industrial past.

While the above discussion depicts a positive picture of globalization and its influence on architectural style, there are contenders to it as well. Anti-global forces, such as humanists, claim that globalization has eradicated that which is essentially cultural of a place. By introducing functional, standardization and open space urbanism, cities of the world have replaced their historical skyline with ugly steel and concrete. Furthermore, the efforts to standardize and systemize have eradicated cultural identity that is the essence of a nation or state. Instead, today architectural designs are dominated by political hegemony and economic dominance. Buildings of today, like the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Dubai Airport and Thai Airports, all seem to belong to one style. Malls across the world, for instance, reflect similar functionality, devoid of humanism or cultural identity. Nevertheless, their argument cannot reason with the fact that global designs have purpose and help in conservation of the environment through effective utilization of spaces. It is this new style that provides habitation spaces without compromising land use (Scarpaci 2005; Umbach and Bernd 2005).

## Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that globalization has positively influenced architectural practices and styles. It reflects the culture of modernization, systemization, standardization and functional logic. It also depicts cultural integration, harmonization of spaces and universal consumerism. No doubt, the classical school of thought considers globalization of architecture as infringement over individuality and cultural identity. Nevertheless, they must contend that globalization has in fact alleviated localization through vernacular designs. The writer contends that globalization has replaced the individual aesthetic and cultural uniqueness. One must also acknowledge the fact that globalization has “mass produced” architecture that once had been a profession of individualism and unparalleled skills. Yet, globalization has benefited more through creative and functional architectural styles, as compared to the classical buildings that benefits a few group of high elites only.

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