Editorial 2

Ugo Rossi
The centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere

Abstract
The current issue of the magazine is going to consider the role of several expressions of cultural diversity in the epoch of globalization that, on one side have contributed to promoting and sharing, under many aspects, a variety of cultural phenomena, but on the other have tended to indifferently assimilate them, consequently contributing to the erasure of their intrinsic differences. The progression of such a zeroing process, the one that Kenneth Frampton called Critical Regionalism, represents today a forcefully resurfacing phenomenon, contrasting somehow the wide spreading of a more linear and global development, that evidently, today more than ever, has demonstrated its inability not only to guarantee a better world but rather to be harmful to the future of the planet.

Que l'homme étant revenu à soi considère ce qu'il est au prix de ce qui est, qu'il se regarde comme égaré, et que de ce petit cachot où il se trouve logé, j'entends l'univers, il apprenne à estimer la terre, les royaumes, les villes, les maisons et soi-même, son juste prix.
Qu'est-ce qu'un homme, dans l'infini?[1]
Blaise Pascal

The current issue of FAM, springs from the intent to investigate the phenomenon of the rebirth of regional and identity representational architecture in the epoch of globalisation.

After the unmotivated euphoria for a planet totally connected and for possible worldwide financial growth, the success of economic and cultural policies, based on consumption and consensus – supported by the foolish delusion of inexhaustible resources and the prevailing global culture – have reached a blind alley. Not only the world has to deal with the many related geo-political and cultural issues, but also (for decades now) the entire stability of the planet has been put in grave danger, literally on the brink of disaster. The unstoppable rising of temperatures all over the world, the melting of glaciers and the ice cap, droughts, and pandemics, are only but a few of the most noticeable consequences of the economic development of mass consumption and globalisation. As well as that, it seems as though, nowadays, it has become very conspicuous the surfacing phenomenon of radicalization (often enough very extreme) for the protection of the identity roots of the countries to which the benefits and possibilities "guaranteed" by globalisation are precluded.

It is obvious then that globalisation, on one hand, has contributed to the partaking and the spreading, under very many aspects, of economic and

cultural growth, but on the other it has worked to assimilate them quite indiscriminately, contributing to the erasing of their differences. Within a such zeroing process, what Kenneth Frampton called Critical Regionalism, represents today a powerfully resurfacing trend, a contrasting force to a linear and global economic and cultural development, that evidently, today more than ever before, has demonstrated its inability to safeguard a better world and to be, on the contrary, dangerously harmful for the future of the planet (Schumacher 1973; Mattelart 2000).

In spite of the fact that the process of international globalisation goes back to ancient times, in its own way even to prehistoric ones (Childe 1974), it has become apparent, since the 1850s, that the "clash" between the ethnocentric convictions related to the linearity of the sequence westernisation-modernization-development-progress, and the convictions relating to the plurality of cultures has become unavoidable. Nonetheless, though, Ted Levitt observed that in the 1980s the problem related to the fact that markets started to operate on international levels was actually a problem that ignored any kind of plurality, to the point that we can actually say that the time of national and local differences is very far away, the very same differences that due to culture, norms and structures are now mere vestiges of the past.

Inevitably, the convergence, or the tendency of everything and anybody to become like anything else and everybody else, is going to orientate the market towards a global community. Not to mention the fact that everywhere and with increasing frequency, individuals' desires and behaviours start to evolve in the same way: Coca-Cola, microprocessors, jeans, pizza, beauty products or milling machines (Levitt 1983); getting to the point that, in 1980, the *International Federation of Institutes of Advanced Studies*, noticed that the classic approaches to general economic growth had actually violated the first principle of human dignity: the respect for humankind as individuals and for their culture. The majority of the ones responsible for the "bettering" of humanity, ultimately, had used individuals and cultures in general as mere instruments of economic growth or like pliable variables to achieve a certain change ascribable to specific objectives. The cultural roots of the vast majority of the peoples on the planet are inevitably bound to the geographical areas that they occupy and for that, they have their own distinctive history, norms and sets of values. The claim for one's cultural difference does not imply a rejection to partake in a more global responsibility nor it implies some sort of blind parochial spirit (Galtung 1980).

Where the cultural set-up postulated "traditional" societies in contrast with the "modern" ones, the overturning of that perspective, which recently has started to take place, has revealed that societies are essentially unstable and in perpetual motion, constantly elaborating their core elements because of the conflicting renegotiations of their identity (Lyotard 1979).

No matter how uncertain might be the outcome of that overturning, but it is going to be most obvious how very challenging that would be before the construction of a worldly sense of belonging and if the new ways of re-discussion of the notion of development/progress – with a resulting reflection on cultural identity as the matrix for an "alternative future" – will find it difficult to affirm itself. Decisive and unavoidable will be the breach of environmentalism as a cultural guide to acquire the global dimension of the complexity of the problems for the entire planet and all of humankind (Yilmaz 2021). It was in 1972 when, during the first environmental United

Nations Conference, in Stockholm, for the first time the finger was pointed toward the unequal and destructive quality of the model of growth and development, and on that same occasion it was clearly stated the need to redefine that very same model through the employment of resources less influenced by consumption and the intensive exploitation of nature.

Twentieth-century architectural culture addressed the issue – first internationally and then globally – by expressing and providing a series of proposals. If on one hand the stances essentially focused on confrontation and restoration, on the principle of conservation and on the continuity with any given past cultural heritage – such as the fascination with primitive societies, the reference to Mediterranean, cave, alpine and rural architectures of the Modern Movement – on the other, more recently, the historian Kenneth Frampton, taking from a text by Paul Ricoeur (1961), gave a definition of the concept of "Critical Regionalism", that later on, he elaborated in his book *Modern Architecture: a Critical History* (Frampton 1980).

In his book, Frampton discusses Critical Regionalism as one of the possible answers to the issue put forward by Ricoeur, and throws the foundations for a reflection on the unfolding of a regional form of architecture in which

The term "Critical Regionalism" is not intended to denote the vernacular as this was once spontaneously produced by the combined interaction of climate, culture, myth and craft, but rather to identify those recent regional 'schools' whose primary aim has been to reflect and serve the limited constituencies in which they are grounded. Among other factors contributing to the emergence of a regionalism of this order is not only a certain prosperity but also some kind of anti-centrist consensus – an aspiration at least to some form of cultural, economic and political independence. (Frampton 1980, p. 313)

If the discussion on vernacular architecture originated from a local cultural and climatic tradition appears outdated, however, the larger one, linked to universalization and to the idea of «the spreading before our eyes of a mediocre civilization», explained in Ricoeur's text, remains to be investigated.

Moreover, what strikes Frampton, in Ricoeur's extract (1961), is that current regional and national culture should consist of local declinations of a more "worldly" expression. In the future, each and every single cultural expression should feed on the more vital forms of regional traditions, still absorbing external influences both in terms of civilization and culture, in which on one side it will be endorsed the models of universal civilization, and on the other, it will be heralded the values of a culture motivated by idiosyncratic elements. It is true though, that as Ricoeur wrote (1961),

No one can say what will become of our civilization when it has really met different civilizations by means other than the shock of conquest and domination. But we have to admit that this encounter has not yet taken place at the level of an authentic dialogue […] There is that paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization Ricoeur. (Ricoeur 1961, p. 283; Frampton 1980, p. 313)

If with such a paradox the issues of survival and of the intrinsic value of different cultures have been under for a long time under "world" scrutiny, another topic, – the survival of the planet – prevails on the global stage as a matter of urgency. Unfortunately, in reply to the environmental conferences and to the protocols for the safeguarding of the planet, in order to convert the model of linear development into a sustainable and circular

one, architects and urban planners, in conjunction with the scientists and researchers of the most important labs in the world[2], have come up with sophisticated technological proposals: smart homes, and *Smart Cities* (Song, Selim 2022; Biswas, Dey, 2022). Practically speaking, the use of power within the *Smart Cities* – as well as in smart homes – relies on the use of renewable resources, AI and highly advanced technologies and devices, capable of processing huge amounts of data applied to an efficient urban project, with passive planning elements, can reach up to 70% in energy saving in comparison with "traditional" homes and metropolises; however, the *Smart Cities* built from scratch and completely prescriptive – in them everything is regulated, calculated, monitored and defined – are actually extremely expensive products. In those cities, as explained by Richard Sennett (2018), instead of reducing the construction expenses and costs, these become much higher.

Forty years from the text by Frampton, and almost sixty from Ricoeur's one, after the process of simplification and cultural internationalization has assumed planetary proportions, that today we say to be "global", the authors of the essays have been asked the following questions as a conventional outline to refer to:

1. Does Regional architecture still exist?
2. What is the actual purpose, nowadays when discussing regional architecture?
3. What is today's meaning of Regional architecture?
4. Why, and in which context or occasion is regional architecture still topical today?
5. In terms of planning processes, what are the differences between regional architecture and international/global one?
6. Does a global architecture actually exist?
7. Can we say that specific and diversified solutions can coexist in order to achieve the survival of diversity amid different people and cultures of the world in contrast with global socio-economic problems?
8. Is it still possible to talk about authentic and autochthonous architecture in a time of global culture and consensus?
9. Is it possible to reconcile the "model" for a sustainable home with the one for the Smart City - and its technological systems - on a planet differently developed?
10. How can such a model be implemented in poorer countries?
11. How can such a "model" be implemented in those countries with a rich history and ancient forms of architecture? What is the actual fate of historical cities and architectures, that very often can not be turned into Smart Cities or in buildings with low power emissions, high technological efficiency, and low power consumption?
12. Which other models have already been implemented, or are about to be, in order to diversify the solutions regarding the specific site needs and possibilities of the many different countries?

The authors, Ray Bromley, Luigi Coccia, Alberto Ferlenga, Kenneth Frampton, Anna Bruna Menghini, Ludovico Micara, Nicola Pagnano, Ugo Rossi, Ettore Vadini, were asked to supply considerations, studies and investigations, experiences and actual evidence that would address those questions or that would amplify those issues.

Kenneth Frampton has taken part in this issue of the magazine by answer-

Notes

[1] Let man consider his own being compared with all that is; let him regard himself as wandering in this remote province of nature; and from the little dungeon in which he finds himself lodged, I mean the universe, let him learn to set a true value on the earth, on its kingdoms, its cities, and on himself.

What is a man in the infinite?

[2] See the studies and researchers carried out at the MIT'S Media Lab: Mitchell (1996).

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Ugo Rossi, trained as an architect in Venice and Milan. After his master's degree at the Polytechnic in Milan, he continued his studies in Venice, where he received his PhD at Iuav University with a thesis on Bernard Rudofsky. His theoretical and practical interests focus on the investigation of the different meanings of modernity and the intersections between history and culture in the critical practice of modern and contemporary architecture. He writes essays and articles published in books and national and international journals. On his latest publication: T*radizione e Modernità, l'influsso dell'architettura ordinaria nel moderno* (LetteraVentidue, Macerata 2015), *Bernard Rudofsky Architect* (CLEAN, Napoli 2016).