



CONTEMPORARY VIETNAMESE ARCHITECTURE: THE INTERSECTION OF EASTERN IDENTITY AND MODERN THINKING

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Abstract

This article analyzes the relationship between Eastern cultural identity and modern thinking in contemporary Vietnamese architecture through five representative projects in major urban areas. Applying a theoretical framework that includes Critical Regionalism (Frampton, 1983), cultural expression in architecture (Rapoport, 2005), and modern design thinking, the study employs a qualitative analysis method, comparing data on spatial organization, materials, and symbolism. The results show that all the projects demonstrate a creative fusion of tradition and modernity, with architects acting as cultural translators. The article contributes a new approach to shaping urban architectural trends that are both rich in identity and responsive to the demands of modern development.

Keywords: Contemporary architecture, Identity, Modernity, Localization, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In the context of rapid globalization and modernization over recent decades, Vietnamese architecture is undergoing a profound transformation in terms of form, design philosophy, and symbolic value. Since the Đổi Mới (Renovation) reforms in 1986, major cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang have witnessed a boom in modern-style constructions that employ advanced technologies, new materials, and embrace global architectural trends such as green design, minimalism, and sustainability (Nguyễn Hồng Thục, 2015). However, accompanying this rapid development is growing concern over the erosion of national architectural identity, the repetition of forms, and the phenomenon of “placelessness”—buildings that no longer reflect cultural characteristics—as identified by Kenneth Frampton in his theory of Critical Regionalism (Frampton, 1983). The central challenge is how contemporary architectural works in Vietnam can embody a spirit of innovation and integration while preserving traditional elements, which form the core of urban cultural identity. The tension between modernist thinking—which emphasizes functionality and a universal language—and the need to maintain local elements in design has become a key issue for architects and urban planners. In this context, the present study aims to analyze the relationship between architecture and cultural identity, identify the characteristics of integration between tradition and modern thinking, and compare the design strategies of architects in major cities. The central research question is: How do contemporary architectural works express the fusion of Eastern identity and modern thinking? Based on this question, the study seeks not only to

identify the manifestations of cultural identity in urban architecture but also to clarify the role of architecture as a medium for expressing and restructuring culture in the modern era (Rapoport, 1969; Dayaratne, 2022). The scope of the study is limited to the analysis of five representative contemporary architectural works in major Vietnamese cities. The article focuses on design elements, symbolism, materials, and forms of cultural space, without delving into construction techniques or post-construction sociological impacts.

2. Literature review

Over the past decade, research on contemporary Vietnamese architecture—particularly the relationship between Eastern identity and modern thinking—has drawn significant attention from both domestic and international academic communities. One prominent approach is the redefinition of “Tropical Modernism” in the context of Southeast Asia, where climatic conditions, colonial history, and pressures of globalization have made architecture a space of cultural intersection. Several studies, such as “Tropical Modernity in Architecture of Public Higher Education Institutes in Saigon–Ho Chi Minh City during 1954–1975”, have analyzed how university buildings in Ho Chi Minh City (1954–1975) adapted modernism through envelope design and local materials, clearly demonstrating a localized design mindset under specific climatic conditions (Truong Thanh Hai, 2025). In parallel, specialized publications on Southern Vietnamese modern architecture such as “Southern Vietnamese Modernist Architecture: Mid-Century Vernacular Modernism” and “Poetic Significance, Sài Gòn Mid-Century Modernist Architecture” affirm that this form of modernism is continuously transformative, inherently linked to vernacular language and the distinct tropical spirit (Pham Phu Vinh, 2021; Mel, Alexandre, 2020).

From the perspective of identity thinking and architectural theory, the study “Modern Architecture in Vietnam or Vietnamese Modern Architecture?” by Phạm Thúy Loan has clarified the issue of modern identity and the process of localization initiated by Vietnamese architects, particularly in the post-colonial period. Another study by Phạm Phú Vinh, “From Lodge to Villa: Vernacular Modernism in Vietnam”, offers an insightful observation that “tropically modern” design techniques in Vietnam often occur without overt cultural ornamentation, but rather through subtle structural and climatic adjustments. However, these studies mostly focus on the past or identity through the lens of materials, lacking a modern theoretical framework that treats identity as a “dynamic process”, and have yet to systematically address the relationship between architecture and culture in contemporary spaces (Pham Phu Vinh, 2020; Phạm Thúy Loan, 2017).

In the regional context, works such as *Paths of Modern Movement: Vietnam, Cambodia* (Agata Bonenberg, 2017) compare the influence between architects Van Molyvann (Cambodia) and Ngô Viết Thụ (Vietnam) to illustrate the potential for “strategic translation” between modern knowledge and tradition in Southeast Asian architecture. Despite their historical and regional comparative value, these studies remain centered on the 20th century, lacking contemporary qualitative or quantitative data to demonstrate mechanisms of cultural intersection in current architectural projects.

From this literature review, several research gaps can be clearly identified: (1) a lack of studies on the modernization of Tropical Modernism at the scale of major urban centers such as Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City; (2) the absence of a theoretical framework that sees identity as a dynamic process—an ongoing interaction between design, culture, and users; (3) limited

empirical analysis of the practices of contemporary architects; and (4) a lack of interregional or international comparisons grounded in concrete qualitative or quantitative evidence.

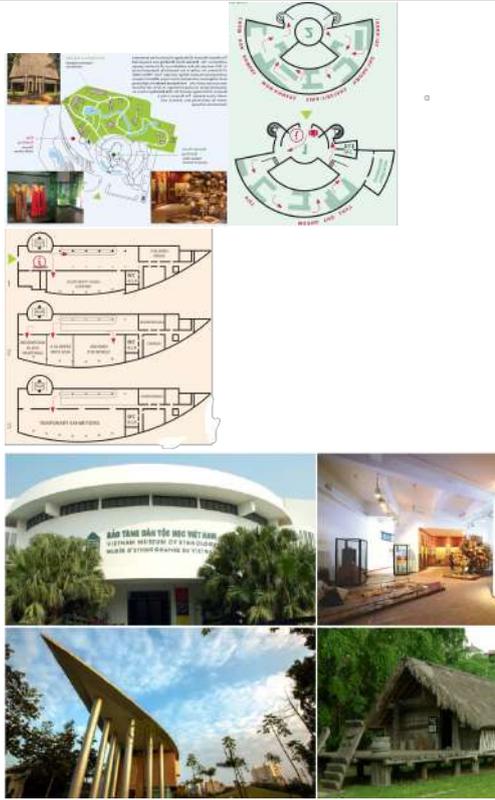
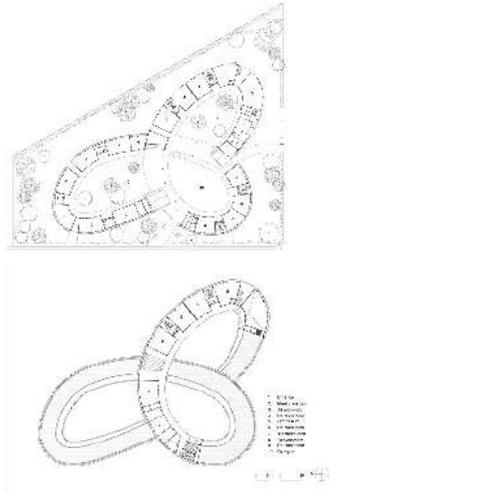
The academic contribution of this study lies in addressing part of these gaps. By constructing an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates localized thinking, cultural expression theory, and modern philosophy, and by analyzing five representative projects across three major cities, this paper proposes a multidimensional comparative model encompassing traditional elements, modernity, and specific urban contexts. In doing so, the research not only clarifies how identity is manifested in architecture, but also contributes to forming a new way of thinking—where architecture becomes a tool for connecting the past, present, and future of Vietnamese cities in an era of deepening globalization.

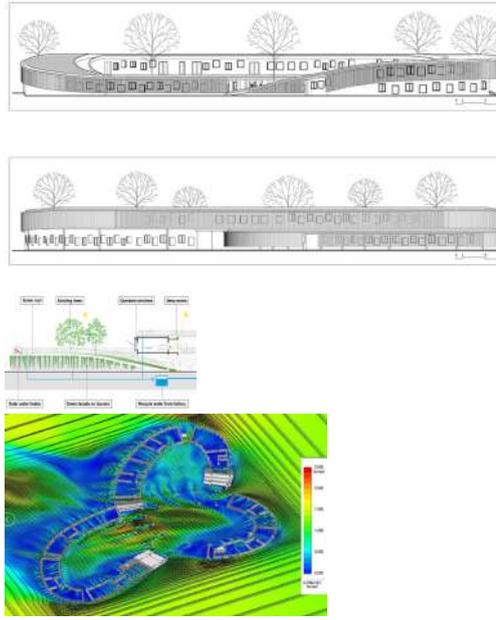
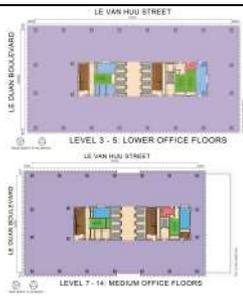
3. Research methodology

This study employs a case study analysis method, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches, in alignment with the critical regionalism framework in architectural research (Yin, 2003; Frampton, 1983). Five projects located in Hanoi, Hoi An, and Ho Chi Minh City were purposefully selected based on their representation of the intersection between local elements (culture, climate, history) and modern design thinking. The data—comprising architectural drawings, photographs, design documents, spatial descriptions, and preliminary interviews with architects—were processed through a matrix of four criteria: morphology, technical materials, cultural symbolism, and modern functionality (Scholz & Tietje, 2002). The cross-regional comparative analysis helps to validate the theoretical framework of “identity as a dynamic process.” The methodology ensures objectivity, reproducibility, and reliability through the use of multiple data sources and an internal validation mechanism (Steinke, 2000; Mills et al., 2010). Through this approach, the study clarifies how contemporary Vietnamese architects not only produce architectural forms but also actively participate in shaping socio-cultural-spatial processes (Frampton, 1983; Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2001).

4. Case Analysis: Space – Symbolism – Identity in Five Representative Projects

The selected projects were chosen based on clear integration of modern design thinking with Eastern cultural identity within the context of urbanization, while also representing a diversity of functions—including education, community, administration, and exhibition. The analysis was conducted using the theoretical framework of “identity as a dynamic process,” combined with a set of criteria comprising: (1) architectural morphology, (2) materials and techniques, (3) cultural symbolism, and (4) modern design logic.

Project Name	Architectural Form	Materials & Techniques	Cultural Symbolism	Modern Design Logic	Images / Architectural Drawings
<p>Vietnam Museum of Ethnology Location: Nguyen Van Huyen St., Cau Giay, Hanoi</p>	<p>Bronze Drum Building, Kite Wing Building, and Architectural Garden; open and flexible spatial design symbolizing diversity and cultural convergence</p>	<p>Wood, bamboo, rattan, clay, thatch roof; local techniques combined with modern structures for durability</p>	<p>Đồng Sơn bronze drum, traditional kite; ethnic house models reflect heritage and multiculturalism</p>	<p>Open, accessible spaces; supports educational activities, cultural preservation, and community interaction</p>	 <p>(source: www.vme.org.vn)</p>
<p>Farming Kindergarten Location: Bien Hoa, Dong Nai (near HCMC)</p>	<p>Continuous architectural ribbon with three circular loops; green roof creates a play-learn environment for children</p>	<p>Brick, tile, green roof, natural ventilation; energy-saving and microclimate responsive</p>	<p>Rooftop vegetable garden symbolizes traditional agriculture; children learn farming in an educational setting</p>	<p>Sustainable solutions (green roof, daylighting, ventilation); integrates education and ecology</p>	

					 <p>(source: ashui.com)</p>
<p>Cam Thanh Community House Location: Cam Thanh Commune, Hoi An, Quang Nam</p>	<p>Series of open spaces with three building blocks surrounding a courtyard; inspired by traditional courtyard house with greenery</p>	<p>Double-layered clay bricks, nipa palm thatched roof, rammed earth walls, bamboo columns; rainwater reuse and climate adaptation</p>	<p>Betel garden, vine plants, and thatched roofs evoke rural culture; community-friendly and approachable design</p>	<p>Climate-responsive and environmentally adaptive; multifunctional and flexible for community needs</p>	 <p>Trellis natural ventilation intake rainwater harvesting for reuse septic tank</p> <p>Local materials</p> <p>Bamboo nipa palm leaves unfired bricks Hopea odorata</p> <p>(source: ashui.com)</p>
<p>Deutsches Haus Location: 33 Le Duan Blvd., District 1, Ho</p>	<p>Two modern towers connected by a glass atrium; transparent</p>	<p>Double-skin façade, sunshading fins, heat recover</p>	<p>Symbol of Germany –Vietnam diplomacy; houses German cultural, economic,</p>	<p>LEED Platinum and DGNB Gold certified; energy-saving,</p>	 <p>LE VAN HUU STREET</p> <p>LE DUAN BLVD</p> <p>LEVEL 3 - 5 - LOWER OFFICE FLOORS</p> <p>LEVEL 7 - 14 - MEDIUM OFFICE FLOORS</p>

<p>Chi Minh City</p>	<p>nt glass façade integrates with urban landscape</p>	<p>y systems, IBMS; optimized energy efficiency</p>	<p>and diplomatic organizations</p>	<p>high air quality, advanced technologies</p>	 <p>(source: ashui.com)</p>
<p>French Cultural Center L'Espac e Location: 24 Trang Tien St., Hoan Kiem, Hanoi</p>	<p>Renovated five-story French colonial building; preserved façade, wooden windows, arched balconies; multifunctional cultural space</p>	<p>Original materials retained (brick walls, high ceilings, wood), with added modern techniques (sound system, air conditioning, projection)</p>	<p>Cultural space of French-Vietnamese exchange; venue for arts, academic, and cultural events</p>	<p>Flexible, multifunctional space; adapted for contemporary needs while preserving heritage architecture</p>	 <p>(source: ashui.com)</p>

Through the analysis of five architectural projects, it becomes evident that identity no longer exists merely as a decorative layer or visual symbol, but is instead embedded in material structures, climatic organization, and spatial grammar. The visual dataset, combined with a qualitative analytical framework, reveals that contemporary Vietnamese architecture is shifting from “representation” to “creation” of identity—where the architect acts as a “context-maker,” using modern techniques and design thinking to evoke memory, environment, and community. This actualizes the theoretical concepts of Critical Regionalism (Frampton, 1983), Cultural Expression (Rapoport, 1969), and Contextual Design (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2001) in the context of global urbanization.

First, identity in contemporary architecture is no longer confined to superficial visual symbols such as ornamentation, motifs, or folkloric imagery—it has become “technicalized” and “climatized.” This is clearly demonstrated in strategies such as the use of bamboo structures instead of traditional concrete (Cảm Thanh Community House), green roofs as

expressions of ecological identity (Farming Kindergarten), or solar screens designed to resemble traditional tube house eaves (Deutsches Haus). These expressions reflect a reconceptualization of identity as an ecosystem of material–function–environment, rather than as a purely symbolic or abstract element (Frampton, 1983; ArchDaily, 2021).

Second, the role of the architect has evolved from that of a “form-maker” to a “cultural translator.” In all five projects, architects actively sought out and restructured traditional values—such as open spaces, natural forms, and collective memory—while expressing them through modern organizational logic. Particularly, the Farming Kindergarten is not merely an educational facility, but a “school ecosystem” where modern thinking (sustainability, openness, interaction) and local culture (vegetable gardening, proximity to nature) coexist in a consistent design system (Frampton, 2019).

Third, all five projects embody a new trend in Vietnamese architecture: identity is no longer a fixed asset to be preserved, but a continuously produced element within the design process. This aligns with the theory of “identity as a dynamic process”, in which each architectural work does not merely represent pre-existing culture but generates new layers of meaning suited to contemporary contexts. L’Espace – French Cultural Center exemplifies this by transforming colonial heritage into a modern academic and social space, embodying a hybrid and multi-layered identity (Phạm Thúy Loan, 2017).

Finally, the projects underscore the importance of contextuality—each identity-modernity design strategy is intrinsically linked to specific climatic, geographic, historical, and regional cultural conditions. The organization of open community space in Hội An, for example, cannot be directly applied to Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi. This demonstrates that architectural localization cannot exist as a rigid formula, but must function as a flexible dialogue with context (Rapoport, 1969; Frampton, 1983).

Synthesizing these four findings, it becomes clear that contemporary Vietnamese architecture is not merely a continuation of tradition or a mimicry of modernism. Rather, it operates as a flexible mechanism in which architects generate new identities through modern languages—via climate-responsive, culturally rooted, and functionally integrated design forms.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation

The research findings indicate that contemporary Vietnamese architecture, rather than simply being an amalgamation of the old and the new, is gradually embodying a profound transformation: from static identity to dynamic identity, from singular symbolism to multi-layered expression, and from imitation of forms to localized creativity. This interpretation aligns with Kenneth Frampton’s concept of “critical regionalism,” which he defines as a counter-response to placeless global modernism, advocating instead for architecture that is deeply rooted in local climate, materials, and cultural memory (Frampton, 1983). In the surveyed projects, identity is not manifested through decorative elements, but embedded in structure, materials, spatial organization, and the way the buildings interact with the natural environment—precisely what Frampton refers to as the “deep, wordless cultural layer” (Frampton, 2019).

The interpretation of results also reveals a convergence between architectural theory and local practice. While Rapoport proposed that architecture is a “system of cultural expression,” shaped by beliefs, habits, and social context (Rapoport, 1969), projects such as the Farming Kindergarten and Cam Thanh Community House embody that very spirit. Space is not merely designed for use, but to convey values—from closeness to nature, to a sense of community, or the memory of traditional ways of living. Crucially, these expressions do not imitate heritage, but rather “reconstruct grammar”—that is, they use structural, geometric, and material elements to activate cultural experience in a contemporary manner. This is a highly dynamic approach, consistent with how modern scholars like Tzonis and Lefaivre have expanded the concept of regionalism from “traditionalization” to “contextualized creativity” (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2001).

The clear differences among the five projects do not weaken the argument; on the contrary, they reinforce the diversity of identity and the high adaptability of Vietnamese architecture. For instance, while L’Espace – the French Cultural Center exemplifies identity as a historical–present fusion, Deutsches Haus demonstrates the technical articulation of identity through a bioclimatic façade. This illustrates that identity is no longer viewed as a nostalgic return to tradition, but as a process of architectural transformation of history, memory, and environment according to the logic of the present. In other words, identity in contemporary Vietnamese architecture results from the ongoing interaction among three key elements: local conditions (geography – climate – society), modern design thinking, and the creative agency of the architect.

Notably, these findings also reassert the role of the architect in the formation of identity. Rather than serving merely as a formal translator, the architect now assumes the role of a “modern localizer”—someone who uses technical tools and spatial organization thinking to create new layers of meaning for urban Vietnamese architecture (Nguyen Hong Thuc, 2015). This stands in stark contrast to the dominant 20th-century view that saw identity as a fixed value to be preserved. In today’s era, as Frampton emphasizes, identity is not an immutable object, but a dialogical process between history, environment, and the future (Frampton, 2019).

5.2. Connection

The interconnection among the five case studies not only helps establish overarching trends in contemporary Vietnamese architecture but also clarifies regional distinctions, design orientations, and the theoretical standpoints of the architects. The point of departure for this connection lies in the fact that all the projects reflect a proactive effort to integrate cultural identity into modern thinking, rather than allowing these two elements to coexist passively or in opposition. Despite differences in scale, function, and geographical context, the projects all exhibit a tendency toward “identity transformation” through three dimensions: architectural form, material selection, and spatial organization (Frampton, 1983; Rapoport, 1969). This reveals a relatively coherent pattern in contemporary Vietnamese architectural thinking: identity is not reproduced as a static entity but interpreted as a dynamic system that interacts with the present.

A prominent link is how identity is translated into form and technical structure. In the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, identity is expressed through the curved roof that evokes the image of a *nhà rông* (traditional communal house); in Deutsches Haus, local imagery subtly

appears through the sun-shading fins; and in Cam Thanh Community House, identity is conveyed through bamboo structures and a double-roof system. This diversity of expression indicates that identity is not a single motif but a flexible value spectrum, contingent upon the design objectives, social context, and cultural sensitivity of the architect. This aligns fully with Tzonis & Lefaivre's argument that regionalist architecture need not remain loyal to specific symbols, but must reflect a "contextual mode of thinking" (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2001).

Another shared feature among the projects is the role of the natural environment in shaping architectural identity. Farming Kindergarten and Cam Thanh Community House both utilize natural ventilation, indirect lighting, and green roofs—not merely as technical solutions but as expressions of traditional values that emphasize harmony with nature. Deutsches Haus adopts similar strategies at a higher degree of technical sophistication, suitable for a commercial building—demonstrating a shift from intuitive localization to technological localization in design thinking. This evolution reflects Frampton's observation that modern architecture achieves identity only when it harmonizes the "logic of technology with local cultural memory" (Frampton, 2019).

Additionally, the projects all reflect a trend toward community-oriented and socially responsive architecture, albeit to varying degrees. The Museum of Ethnology preserves ethnographic memory; Cam Thanh Community House serves as a space for village communal life; and L'Espace functions as an open cultural and language center. The presence of public space within the structural core of these buildings represents the convergence of identity and modernity—space that is not only functional but also fosters connection and collective identity (Nguyen Hong Thuc, 2015). This aspect is strongly emphasized by Rapoport, who argues that architectural form only becomes a cultural symbol when it simultaneously functions as a social space (Rapoport, 2005).

Thus, the interconnection among these projects lies not only in their formal or material similarities, but more importantly in the consistency of their architectural reasoning: a shift from viewing identity as a static heritage repository to conceiving it as an ongoing process of socio-technological-environmental construction. This marks a movement that is both theoretically sophisticated and practically grounded—well-suited to the current globalized context, where identity is no longer a confined legacy, but a creative capacity for communities to respond to urbanization and climate change.

5.3. Justification

The central argument of this study is that, in contemporary Vietnamese architecture, identity no longer serves solely as a symbolic or aesthetic element, but has become a design-thinking strategy—where identity functions as a dynamic process, activated by context, structure, and the creative intervention of the architect. To test this argument, the study juxtaposes five built projects with three theoretical frameworks: Kenneth Frampton's Critical Regionalism, Amos Rapoport's theory of cultural expression, and Tzonis & Lefaivre's context-driven modern architectural thinking.

First, Frampton's theory of Critical Regionalism does not call for the restoration of tradition or the recreation of the past, but emphasizes the re-structuring of cultural memory under contemporary climatic and technical conditions. This idea is clearly embodied in projects such as Farming Kindergarten and Deutsches Haus, where elements of identity (e.g.,

the motif of traditional gardens, the brise-soleil of tube houses) are translated into efficient technical structures that respond to the climate and reduce energy use—aligning precisely with Frampton’s view that authentic identity must “reflect the physical structure and local environment, rather than rely on labeled symbols” (Frampton, 1983). By realizing the principle of “resistance through place”—a counter-response to globalization through deep locality—these projects demonstrate high compatibility with Frampton’s theory (Frampton, 2019). Furthermore, Frampton asserts that in the globalized era, architecture must not be a blind replication of international forms but should be deeply rooted in local context, climate, and cultural heritage. Instead of applying international styles indiscriminately, architects must translate local culture into their designs, crafting buildings and spaces that subtly reflect local identity while meeting modern demands. Frampton emphasizes the role of the architect as an intermediary—bridging the past and the present, cultural identity and technological advancement. In projects like Farming Kindergarten, architects do not merely replicate traditional cultural elements but reimagine them through modern thinking, enabling their survival and evolution within an urbanizing and globalizing environment. Thus, the architect’s role shifts from merely “shaping form” to translating and reconfiguring cultural values within contemporary settings (Frampton, 2019). Most of the projects examined align closely with this theoretical position.

Second, when viewed through Amos Rapoport’s theory of cultural expression, it becomes evident that architectural space in these projects not only fulfills functional needs but also carries deep semiotic significance—reflecting systems of values, beliefs, and cultural customs. For example, the Cam Thanh Community House embodies Rapoport’s assertion that “architectural form must be the result of socio-ecological-cultural value systems” (Rapoport, 1969). In this case, the integration of bamboo materials, open spaces, and curved roof structures is not merely a technical decision but a manifestation of a worldview grounded in harmony with nature—a traditional value being rearticulated in a modern context. According to Rapoport, architecture can become a “second-level communication system” when it conveys meanings beyond its physical function—a phenomenon clearly seen in the French Cultural Center L’Espace and the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, both of which organize space in ways that engage collective memory and multicultural symbolism (Rapoport, 2005).

Lastly, within the framework of Tzonis & Lefaivre’s theory of localized modernism, this study shows that Vietnamese architecture is transitioning beyond the phase of “passive localization”—which simply overlays traditional symbols on modern forms—toward “active localization,” where contextual thinking becomes the point of departure for design. Notably, the reconfiguration of public space in the examined projects (from kindergartens to cultural centers) as intersections between tradition and modernity, function and memory, serves as compelling evidence for Tzonis & Lefaivre’s claim that modern architecture only attains cultural depth when it is “embedded into context through critical and refined design gestures” (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2001).

Taken together, these theoretical comparisons suggest not only a connection between theory and practice but also a two-way dynamic—where architectural practice in Vietnam today possesses the capacity to supplement, enrich, and even redefine the very theoretical concepts from which it draws. This serves as evidence of the potential for scholarly construction rooted in local practice—something Frampton once envisioned as a “theoretical

foundation emerging from the periphery” (Frampton, 1983). As such, this study not only verifies existing theory but also contributes to expanding the dialogical space between global academic discourse and local architectural practice.

5.4. Implication

The analyses and arguments presented in this study not only contribute to the theoretical system of contemporary architecture in Vietnam, but also offer important implications for architectural practice, professional education, urban planning, and cultural–architectural policymaking in the context of globalization. First and foremost, the research affirms that identity is not a form of “cultural decoration” with symbolic significance alone, but a core design-thinking material that can inform the entire design strategy—from spatial organization and material selection to the way a building interacts with its environment and community. The integration of identity at the structural level (e.g., the double bamboo roof in Cam Thanh), microclimatic level (e.g., green roof and natural ventilation in Farming Kindergarten), and symbolic level (e.g., French–Vietnamese cultural fusion in L’Espace) demonstrates that identity-oriented thinking can fully align with modern architectural criteria such as technical efficiency, contemporary aesthetics, and functional utility (Frampton, 1983; Rapoport, 1969; Pham Thuy Loan, 2017).

From a design practice perspective, this study recommends that contemporary architects regard identity as a “design resource” rather than merely a “system of symbols.” This means seriously engaging with local context—including climate, topography, indigenous materials, social values, and collective memory—to generate new forms that are locally grounded without resorting to repetition or traditional stereotypes. As Tzonis & Lefaivre emphasized, “there is no identity without innovation, and no innovation without understanding context” (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2001). The way the Cam Thanh Community House organizes open space to simultaneously reduce energy use and maintain village communal living habits exemplifies a replicable model for satellite urban areas or peri-urban zones in transition.

In terms of architectural education, the study argues for a restructuring of curricula to deeply integrate design skills with critical cultural and social thinking. Most architecture schools in Vietnam today still focus heavily on technical and formal aspects, often neglecting the foundational role of history, culture, and environment as contextual bases for developing architectural language. Future architects must be equipped with contextual analytical skills as part of research practice, enabling them to create spaces with new forms of identity without detaching from modern usage needs (Nguyen Hong Thuc, 2015; Frampton, 2019).

With regard to urban and cultural policymaking, a key implication of the research is that authorities in major cities should develop architectural design assessment criteria that go beyond functionality, aesthetics, and technical metrics to include an indicator for “cultural identity reflection” as a guiding standard. Projects like Deutsches Haus prove that integrating local cultural elements into design does not compromise technological performance; on the contrary, it enhances aesthetic depth and symbolic value. Therefore, modern urban planning in Vietnam should prioritize design approaches aligned with intelligent localization—namely, the capacity to translate identity into technical solutions without stifling creativity.

Finally, the study calls for the development of a post-design “social feedback mechanism” that evaluates buildings not only through operational data but also through how communities perceive, use, and resonate with the cultural elements embedded in the architecture.

Community-oriented structures like the Cam Thanh Community House or the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology can serve as pilot models for establishing new evaluation criteria, thereby providing empirical evidence for culturally enriched architectural policy.

In conclusion, the practical implications drawn from this research not only benefit architectural practitioners and educators but also open the possibility of establishing an interdisciplinary academic–policy foundation—where architecture is no longer viewed solely as a tool for construction, but as a living, sustainable, and creative space of identity.

6. Conclusion

This study has clarified that contemporary Vietnamese architecture is undergoing a shift—from the replication of traditional forms to a deeply creative and localized process—where Eastern cultural identity is no longer treated as a peripheral ornament but as a core component that guides design thinking. By examining five architectural projects located in Hanoi, Hoi An, and Ho Chi Minh City, the study demonstrates that identity can be subtly expressed through roof structures, the use of local materials, open spatial organization, and interaction with microclimatic environments—thereby achieving a balance between tradition and modern thinking.

The comparison with architectural theories from Frampton, Rapoport, to Tzonis & Lefavre reveals that these projects not only reassert the architect’s role as a “cultural translator,” but also contribute to redefining the theory of identity in the context of contemporary Southeast Asia. The research also yields clear implications for architectural practice and education: identity should not be viewed as a fixed value to be preserved, but as a dynamic process that is continuously reimagined within each project, context, and community.

Alongside its theoretical and practical contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations—particularly in terms of its focus on large urban centers and its lack of in-depth exploration of long-term building performance. Nevertheless, the findings point to significant potential for expanding this line of inquiry into rural areas and peri-urban transitional zones, as well as developing more quantitative evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness of integrating identity, technology, and social dimensions in contemporary Vietnamese architectural design.

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