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CRITICAL REGIONALISM AND THE FORMATION OF RESILIENT CULTURAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY HOTEL ARCHITECTURE IN FREETOWN, SIERRA-LEONE

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This article examines elements that reflect cultural identity, resilience and progress in contemporary hotel design in Freetown, Sierra-Leone. Recent hotel developments increasingly align with the city's capacity to project a culturally grounded and resilient architectural image. It focuses on how architectural design and organization influence the ability of hotels to reflect local identity, enhance resilience, and support sustainable tourism growth. The study employs a case study methodological approach to evaluate the current condition of hotel buildings by identifying critical themes and patterns in the development of hotels cultural identity. The research synthesizes design approaches that have emerged across hotels. The findings reveal that hotel architecture in Freetown predominantly draws on principles of critical regional modernism and experiential interior design, demonstrating how context-responsive architectural approaches can foster both cultural identity and resilience.

Introduction

Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, is undergoing a transformative journey from post-conflict recovery to becoming a burgeoning tourism destination. Central to this evolution is the hotel industry, where architecture serves as a tangible representation of the city's identity, resilience, and aspirations for progress. This paper explores how architectural design in Freetown's hotels reflects these themes and contributes to the broader narrative of the city's development.

This research examines the pivotal role of architectural design in the hotel industry of Freetown, Sierra Leone, as a medium for expressing cultural identity, fostering resilience, and promoting progress within the tourism sector. Resilience in architecture is a topic widely discussed across different global platforms [1]. Through an analysis of key hotel developments and architectural trends, the study highlights how design choices reflect the city's historical context, societal values, and aspirations for

sustainable growth. The global growth is widely communicated in theory by resilience, seen as a critical framework for architecture [2]. Despite the fact that adaptability and resilience are the core of regional responsive architecture, the identity hotel carries are of great importance to the city image [3].

The findings underscore the significance of integrating local heritage and modern design principles to create spaces that resonate with both visitors and the local community. Even though the world is seen as a global edifice, architecture needs to be understood and perceived as an identification to places [4].

Cultural identity through architectural design

There is a global drive for architecture to interpret identity through various cultures [5]. It is imminent to interpret spaces as a regional component to identity in architecture [6]. In Sierra Leone's architecture, designers interpret this by blending industrial materials like concrete and steel with local tactile finishes such as laterite stone, woven textiles, and indigenous timber. They also use motifs that are symbolic to the Sierra Leonean culture to express identity. Architecture in Freetown's hotel industry often incorporates elements that reflect the city's rich cultural heritage.

The "Country lodge hotel" adopts a contemporary international architectural language informed by critical regionalism and restrained material palettes. This global design framework is deliberately fostered to show local architectural expression through the integration of Sierra Leonean handcrafts, indigenous artworks, textures, and motifs within interior spaces (Figure 1, colour plate).

From a theoretical perspective, hotels in Freetown can be read through the lens of critical regionalism, where universal design principles are selectively adapted to local cultural conditions rather than imposed uniformly.

The result is an architectural environment that mediates between global architectural standards and local identity. This produces a culturally legible and place-responsive experience with an emphasis on experiential interiors (Figure 2, colour plate).

Holistically speaking modern cultural heritage are buildings that has an identity [7]. Cultural identity in relation to architectural design has been widely spoken of by african scholars that affirms traditional integration of culture to particular places [8], while contributing to wider discourse on the role of architecture in shaping resilient tourism-driven urban environments in cities of the global south.

Similarly, the "home suites hotel", is a modern hotel which is one of the city's branded boutique hotel, employs a contemporary architectural style characterized by refined materiality. While grounded in international modern design principles, clarity of form, minimal ornamentation, and functional efficiency the hotel strategically incorporates locally inspired aesthetics, textures, and artistic references that anchor the building within its cultural context. From an architectural theory perspective, this approach aligns with critical regionalism and experiential architecture, where global design languages are adapted to local narratives to produce spaces that are culturally legible.

The entrance serves as a "cultural threshold," where modern hospitality meets Sierra Leonean artistic identity. Elements of figurative Portraiture (Figure 3, colour plate) as a focal point of the entrance is a large-scale painting of a West African woman in traditional attire and headwrap. This serves as a "Cultural Signifier," immediately establishing a sense of place and local identity for arriving guests. Also, an Intricate metalwork (Gara-Inspired Patterns), a decorative pattern on the door features geometric,

interlacing metalwork. These patterns often echo the rhythmic, repetitive motifs found in Gara cloth (Sierra Leonean tie-dye) and traditional wood carvings.

The hotel's architecture thus operates as a mediating layer between global architectural frameworks and local identity [9], enhancing guest experience while functioning as a platform for cultural expression and continuity within Freetown's evolving urban landscape.

Resilience in Architectural Practices

When "resilience" is used for complex systems in the context of ecology, it refers to "the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while changing to retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks [10]. The scars of Sierra Leone's civil war and the disaster vulnerability challenges have left indelible marks on Freetown's urban landscape. In response, the hotel industry has adopted architectural practices that emphasize resilience and cultural identity.

Glass (2008) argues that architecture must proactively embed resilience into design by anticipating hazards, adapting buildings and urban systems to risk [11]. However, The country face the challenge of attending to hazards while simultaneously expressing an architectural language that reflects cultural resilience in its identity.

An approach, for hotels that similarly addresses regional concerns and cultural identity is key for the city's critical regional development. These developments signify a commitment to rebuilding and enhancing the city's infrastructure [12].

Moreover, initiatives like the Transform Freetown Agenda launched by the Freetown City Council aim to modernize heritage tourism and strengthen local capacities, it is therefore significant for Freetown to have an architectural language that reflects its local identity [13].

Looking forward, the hotel industry's architectural landscape in Freetown is poised for further innovation. The integration of sustainable design practices, such as the use of eco-friendly materials, that reflects a local cultural identity is becoming increasingly prevalent. Cultural buildings most times reflect the identity of a place by also adapting suitable design practices [14]. These efforts align with global trends towards sustainability and position Freetown as a forward-thinking destination in the tourism sector.

Additionally, the development of heritage tourism, particularly through connections with the African diaspora, presents opportunities for hotels to serve as cultural ambassadors. Hotels need an authentic identity (Figure 4, colour plate), mostly to be termed heritage buildings [15]. By offering experiences that connect visitors with the city's historical sites and narratives, hotels can play a crucial role in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Freetown's heritage [16].

Despite many persistent challenges along the cultural identity and resilient framework for hotels, Freetown's hotels present a local identity that is embedded in the critical regionalist theory. An absence of a clearly articulated architectural and urban framework to guide coordinated hotel development in keeping a uniform identity throughout the urban landscape of Freetown is a challenge. In response, Architectural innovations are one of the best practices for enhancing tourism infrastructure [17].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the article observes a hierarchy of priorities and strategic design directions that align hotel architecture with broader urban objectives, emphasizing identity and resilience. These observations offer a practical framework for multi-level planning and design in Freetown's prime hotel corridor. Architecture in Freetown's

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«КРИТИЧЕСКИЙ РЕГИОНАЛИЗМ И ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ УСТОЙЧИВОЙ
КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ АРХИТЕКТУРЕ ОТЕЛЯ
ВО ФРИТАУНЕ, СЬЕРРА-ЛЕОНЕ»**



Figure 1: *a* – interior of hotel spaces with artworks, motifs specific to Sierra Leone; *b* – interior of hotel space without any cultural motifs

Рис. 1. *a* – интерьер гостиничных помещений с произведениями искусства, мотивами, характерными для Сьерра-Леоне; *б* – интерьер гостиничных помещений без каких-либо культурных мотивов



Figure 2. Elements of critical regionalism incorporated in Freetown's hotel architecture. Photograph of the interior of country lodge hotel

Рис. 2. Элементы критического регионализма, включенные в архитектуру отеля Фритауна. Фотография интерьера отеля *country lodge*



Figure 3. Home suites hotel, Freetown, original architect unknown
 Рис. 3. Отель *home suites*, Фритаун, первоначальный архитектор неизвестен



Figure 4. Photograph of the “Seen hotel project”, an ecological friendly design that provides a cultural identity for hotels in Freetown, Sierra Leone
 Рис. 4. Фотография «Проекта отеля *Seen*», экологически чистого дизайна, который обеспечивает культурную самобытность отелей во Фритауне, Сьерра-Леоне

hotel industry is more than a functional necessity; it is a powerful tool for reflecting the city's identity, demonstrating resilience, and driving progress. Through thoughtful design that honors cultural heritage and incorporates sustainable practices, the hotel sector makes a significant contribution to the broader goals of urban development and tourism in Freetown. As the city continues to evolve, the role of architecture in shaping its future remains integral to its success as a vibrant and dynamic destination.

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КРИТИЧЕСКИЙ РЕГИОНАЛИЗМ И ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ УСТОЙЧИВОЙ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ АРХИТЕКТУРЕ ОТЕЛЕЙ ВО ФРИТАУНЕ, СЬЕРРА-ЛЕОНЕ

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Ключевые слова: критический регионализм, культурная идентичность, устойчивость, региональный модернизм, архитектура отелей.

В этой статье рассматриваются элементы, отражающие культурную самобытность, устойчивость и прогресс в дизайне современных отелей во Фритауне Сьерра, Леоне. Недавние гостиничные проекты все больше соответствуют возможностям города создавать культурно обоснованный и устойчивый архитектурный образ. В нем основное внимание уделяется тому, как архитектурный дизайн и организация влияют на способность отелей отражать местную самобытность, повышать устойчивость и поддерживать устойчивый рост туризма. В исследовании используется методологический подход тематического исследования для оценки текущего состояния гостиничных зданий путем выявления важнейших тем и закономерностей в развитии культурной идентичности отелей. В исследовании синтезируются подходы к дизайну, которые появились в разных отелях. Полученные данные показывают, что архитектура отелей во Фритауне преимущественно опирается на принципы критического регионального модернизма и опытного дизайна интерьера, демонстрируя, как архитектурные подходы, учитывающие контекст, могут способствовать как культурной самобытности, так и устойчивости.

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