

Regional identity and conceptual depth in the creativity of modern Kazakh architects-philosophers: Dialogue between form, image and meaning

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Abstract

The creativity of Kazakh architects has varied from seeking innovation during the Soviet era to the identification of national and regional characteristics during the years of independence. Among Kazakhstan's many talented architects, masters such as Bek Ibrayev and Saken Narynov occupy a special niche, acted as both builders and conceptual thinkers and philosophers. They embodied in their projects a deep synthesis of form, image, meaning and cultural context. Architects with developed cultural reflection, as carriers of local identity, used architectural space as a philosophical statement, expressing ideas about time, memory and human experience. The aim of the research is to analyze and identify the distinctive features of the architectural heritage of B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov, revealing the approaches and conceptual depth of their work, which determined their role as architect-philosophers in shaping the regional architectural identity. The methodology is based on a comprehensive approach that includes field research, architectural and compositional analysis, and semantic interpretation of completed projects by B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov. The material and spatial characteristics of architectural objects were taken into account, as well as their intellectual and symbolic content, reflecting the authors' ideas and their correlation with regional identity. The comparative study was conducted to identify ways of interpreting traditional forms, images and archetypes in contemporary architectural practice. As a result, the key techniques of form creation and semantic transformation of each architect were identified, contributing to the formation of a new architectural language that combines cultural memory and local identity. For contemporary practice in Kazakhstan, the significance of this research lies in the fact that, using the examples of projects by B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov, the Kazakh architectural context is learning to perceive regionalism not as stylistic adaptation, but as a unique philosophical and cultural strategy. This strategy is based on the deep archetypes of nomadic civilization, the mythopoetic of space, and the sacred geography of the steppe.

Keywords: architectural form, image, meaning, regional identity, creativity, architects-philosophers

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Introduction

After gaining independence in 1991, Kazakh architects sought to seek originality in architecture, driven by the increasing desire of society to find their own identity through the ethnic and cultural codes. The opportunity to experiment with form and meaning based on dialogue with the local context served as an impetus for the development of an individual author's vision of regional architecture, motivating uniqueness, originality and innovation in creativity. The contemporary work of talented masters of Kazakh architecture mainly reflects cultural codes formed in the context of traditions, history and philosophy and transformed in the conditions of political, economic and socio-cultural processes both within Kazakhstan and globally.

Kazakh architects' reliance on local identity – their deep knowledge of Kazakh history, traditions, philosophy and worldview, as well as the region's natural and climatic characteristics – has become a crucial factor in shaping the regional architectural images of the country's largest cities (Abdrasilova & Danibekova, 2021); (Abdrasilova & Murzagaliyeva, 2017).

Kazakh architects such as Bek Ibrayev (1947-2019), Saken Narynov (1946-2023) and many others are creators of unique architectural spaces who have made a mark on the history of country's architecture. Their professional activities developed in the changing conditions at the end of the last quarter of the 20th and early 21st centuries. In terms of assessing the originality of spatial planning solutions, artistic images, the reflection of cultural codes and designated identity, the most favorable periods for Kazakh architects were the 1980s and early 2000s.

Bek Anuarbekovich Ibrayev was a particularly significant creative figure as a philosopher, historian, and extraordinary thinker. His fruitful work took place in the last decades of the 20th century. Bek Ibrayev was an internationally renowned architect, winner of various international biennials, competitions and festivals, academician of the International Academy of Architecture of Eastern Countries, professor of architecture at the International Academy of Architecture (IAA). He is also the Honored Architect of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the author of a several significant projects throughout the country as well as numerous concepts and sketches expressing innovative interpretations of cultural identity. Famous works include the "Korkyt Ata" memorial complex (1980, architect B. Ibrayev, physicist-acoustician S. Isatayev, Kyzylorda Region) (Kumyrzak, 2017), the Shokan Valikhanov Memorial Museum 'Altyn-Emel' (1985, R. Seydalin, B. Ibrayev, S. Rustambekov, Almaty Region) (Tankaeva, 2025), the mausoleum of batyr Raimbek (1994, architects B. Ibrayev, Sh. Otepbayev, S. Agytayev, Almaty) (Chesnok & Ibraev, 2017), Karasai and Agyntai Batyrs Memorial Complex (1995, architects B. Ibrayev, S. Agytayev, North Kazakhstan Region) (Ekimbaeva & Shauenova, 2020), Abay and Shakarim Memorial Complex (1996, architects B. Ibrayev, S. Agytayev, L. Karpykov) and many others.

Bek Anuarbekovich Ibraev was born in 1947 in the city of Kyzylorda in southern Kazakhstan. From a young age, Bek Ibrayev demonstrated a passion for learning and creativity, as well as an interest in biology, history and ethnography of the region. This is evidenced by the notes and drawings in his diary, where Bek recorded his observations, thoughts and ideas during hikes at the Young Tourists' Station in 1962-1963 (Kyzylordinskie Vesti, 2019; Baishulenov, 2023). His education and professional background contributed to his diverse and rich career as an architect: from teaching at the Faculty of Architecture in the 1970s and 1980s, working at scientific institutes from 1978 to 1990, and leading the design workshop "Eldana" since 1990.

Bek Ibrayev was not just an architect, but also someone with a deep understanding of Kazakhs' ethnic identity. Bold expressions of identity in architecture are impossible without a deep knowledge of the culture and history of the region. The philosophical views and interest in mysticism of this talented professional and culturally sensitive researcher became the source of unique approaches to form creation, which were evident in his projects.

Saduakas Agytayev, a long-time colleague of Bek Ibrayev on projects, an employee of the Kazrestavratsiya State Agency and one of the architects of the Abay and Shakarim Memorial Complex, refers to B. Ibrayev as his mentor and describes him as "(...) the strongest ethnographer, who knew the history, art and genetics of the Kazakhs very well (...) who gave architectural sculptures a national

spirit, ethnic style, and unique direction (...)” (Baishulenov, 2023).

The concepts of B. Ibraev's projects are rooted in history and traditions, interpreted in a modern way. For example, traditional Kazakh beliefs and the concept of the world being divided into three levels (underground, middle, and upper) are expressed in the architecture of the memorial complexes 'Korkyt Ata,' Abay and Shakarim, and the Altyn-Emel Museum. Archetypal symbols became the formative basis for the tower silhouettes of the mausoleum of the batyr Raimbek, the Karasai and Agyntai batyrs complex, and again Korkyt Ata, Abay and Shakarim.

Saken Zhomartovich Narynov, a talented architect and innovator was born in 1946 in the village of Issyk, Almaty Region (Abdrassilova & Aukhadiyeva, 2021). It is possible that the visually saturated environment of the multi-layered landscape of the Almaty region contributed to the future architect's deep understanding of harmony and balance, encouraging him to creativity and inspiration. At the same time, his childhood fascination with books about space and his thirst for knowledge of the unknown shaped the future architect's own vision of the world.

Later, as an expert in architecture, S. Narynov expanded his knowledge by studying the works of researchers and the experience of experimenters in different fields, such as Möbius Strip, Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, R. Buckminster Fuller, Maurits Escher, and others. As an architect, S. Narynov also valued the creativity of his colleagues: Kisho Kurokawa, Ivan Leonidov, Vladimir Tatlin, Vladimir Shukhov, Yakov Chernikhov, and others (Mazorenko, 2023).

Thus, the desire to explore beyond his field of activity led S. Narynov to become an experimental architect and innovator-conceptualist in Kazakh architecture. The main source of his creativity was the symbiosis of humanistic knowledge about the culture, history and traditions of the region with well-known scientific theories from the fields of mathematics, physics, and geometry. This unique vision of the world, based on theories of time and space, inspired the architect to create a variety of projects, including experiments and futuristic ideas, sculptural compositions, memorial complexes, public and residential buildings.

Basically, the work of architect Saken Narynov was based on his ability to see symbols and meanings behind every object, drawing on archetypes and the meaning of the universe (Mikhailova, 2019). In particular, the architect's design approaches were based on the ideas of dualistic myths (Tokarev, 1991). Like any phenomenon or event, the architectural solution to the complex has two sides: the obvious and the hidden, the tragic and the hopeful, the sad and the bright aspects.

The architect's philosophy was based on the movement of opposites replacing each other: "(...) the interaction of opposing forces gives us development. ... every time one state transitions into another, it criticizes and questions the structure and correctness of the first, previous state. (...) at one point, you can see the universe, and in the entire universe, you can see one point (...)” (Orazbekova, 2024).

A systemic analysis of the architectural heritage of Kazakh architects will reveal their unique approaches and methods. The study will evaluate their contribution to the creation of new forms and symbols in contemporary architecture, identify mechanisms for shaping regional identity through worldview and spatial thinking, and determine potential directions for further research.

Research methods and implementation

The research methodology is based on a comprehensive study of the architectural heritage of contemporary architects in Kazakhstan. The logic of shaping and compositional features are studied based on the author's interpretation of space through the following aspects: the formation and conditions of individual style; inclusion in the cultural, historical and sociological context (cultural identity, worldview, consideration of the political and economic situation); recourse to artistic and figurative interpretation of space. A field survey was conducted, projects, archives, interviews, memoirs, scientific research, etc. were reviewed. The interrelationship between the creative work of Kazakh architects and the cultural, social and urban context has been studied, as well as their ability to interpret meanings, signs and symbols. A comparative analysis of the architects' creative approaches and their work as carriers of regional identity in modern Kazakh architecture is presented.

In order to identify the architectural language and individual handwriting of Bek Ibrayev and Saken Narynov, we appealed to their designs for memorial and museum complexes. The work of many Kazakhstani architects at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries is associated with similar projects, which require dialogue with the historical and cultural context, reference to traditional forms, and sensitivity to the symbolic content of space.

Experience shows that museum architecture, with its rich imagery and reflection of local characteristics, acts as an outer shell that enhances the emotional depth of the exhibition material (Murzagaliyeva & Abdrassilova, 2020). The most significant works by the architects, based on the traditional Kazakh worldview and having socio-cultural significance, are the Abay and Shakhim Memorial Complex (1995-1996, architects B. Ibrayev, S. Agytayev, L. Karpykov, designer - T. Erzhigitov, artist - K. Altynbekov) and the "ALGIR" Memorial and Museum Complex in Memory of Victims of Political Repression (2007, architect S. Narynov). The choice of these objects is dictated by the opportunity to identify ways of conveying regional identity in architectural space, which acts as a philosophical statement. Using these projects as examples, which demonstrate compositional and artistic achievements in the development of building forms, it is possible to trace the trends in the formation of a new architectural language that reflects the identity of contemporary Kazakh architecture. Both complexes demonstrate different but similar phenomenological methods of working with space through memory, symbolism and the context of place. At the same time, visitors' emotional perception, recognition of symbols and associative analogies are activated.

This representativeness, characteristic of these architectural objects - carriers of meaning and memory - allows us to base our approach on the principles of K. Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology of architecture and J. Palasma's architectural semiotics (Norberg-Schulz, 1971; Pallasmaa, 2008).

Literature revue

Scientific literature related to sources containing questions on the theory and history of architecture and urban planning in Kazakhstan was reviewed in the works of scholars such as Glaudinov B.A. (Glaudinov, 2019), Galimzhanova A.S., Glaudinova M.B. (Galimzhanova & Glaudinova, 2011), Kissamedin G. M. (Kisamedin, 2012; Kisamedin, 2013), Samoilov K. I. (Samoylov, 2004), among others.

A significant amount of scientific literature is devoted to finding ways to shape regional identity and integrate traditional elements into Kazakhstan's modern architectural and urban planning model (Abdrassilova & Danibekova, 2021); (Abdrassilova, 2010); (Abdrassilova et al., 2025); (Danibekova, 2023); (Danibekova et al., 2025). A number of scientific works are devoted to the creativity of Kazakhstani architects (Tazhidaulet & Danibekova, 2024); (Omirezakova & Abdrassilova, 2024); (Nurdubaeva et al., 2025).

Kazakh scientists have presented an analysis of the influence of cultural and ethnic factors on architectural images, the symbolism of traditional forms and their interpretations in contemporary Kazakh architecture as carriers of regional identity (Aukhadiyeva & Karatseyeva, 2022); (Tanjarykova & Maulenova, 2024). The importance of cultural context in rethinking identity and the interaction between traditional and contemporary architecture is also presented in the work "Aspects of contextual architecture regarding traditional/contemporary architecture, physical/cultural and place identity: a systematic literature review" (Al-Hammadi, & Grchev, 2023). At the same time the results of studies revealing the role of philosophical thinking in the process of forming expressive means in creativity are important for our work (Wang & Huang, 2024). By examining the relationship between regional architecture and identity in the Huizhou and Minnan regions of China, researchers surveyed local residents to understand how regional architecture influences the perception of identity and the perceived importance of preserving architectural heritage amidst globalization and modernization. (Cao et al., 2024).

Bek Ibrayev: Abay and Shakarim Memorial Complex

Abay and Shakarim Memorial Complex is located in the north-eastern part of Kazakhstan, the homeland of the Kazakh thinker, poet and educator Abay Kunanbayev (1845-1904). The complex was built on the occasion of Abay's 150th anniversary on the territory of the State Historical, Cultural, Literary and Memorial Reserve-Museum Zhidebai-Borili in the Zhidebai area.

Zhidebay was the family estate where Abay Kunanbayev spent the last eleven years of his life in creative activity, writing most of his poems, including "Words of Edification" and translating the literary works of Russian classic authors from the 19th and 20th centuries into Kazakh (Auezov, 1982). The complex includes the burial place of Abay's nephew, Shakarim Kudaiberdiyev - a poet, historian, philosopher, highly educated man who spoke several Oriental languages. He was also a progressive figure of his time who tragically suffered during the Soviet era (Figure 1a, 1b).

Compositional features

The complex is characterized by its monumental appearance and its function of transmitting cultural values and traditions. The basis of the composition is a stylobate platform that is two hundred meters in length, sixty meters in width, and five meters in height. Small transparent towers surrounding the amphitheater unusual for Turkic culture, are designed to allow natural light into the lower level.

The key elements defining the composition are the two towers above the burial sites themselves – the dominant verticals. The towers are located on the longitudinal axis on equal sides of the amphitheater. One tower stands above the burial of Abay, on the southwest, and the other stands above the burial of Shakarim, on the northeast. The four corners of the stylobate are fixed by low cone-shaped towers, intended for pilgrims to pray and perform rituals. Despite the symmetry of the composition in plan, there is a slight asymmetry in the volumetric solution due to the difference in height between the main towers and their silhouettes. Additionally, to the left of the main entrance there is a mosque with four cone-shaped dome towers, which disrupts the symmetry of the overall composition.

Artistic and imaginative interpretation of space

The project of the memorial complex is characterized by its diverse approaches to form creation. The overall image of the complex is deeply allegorical, with an expressive and basic compositional concept. The silhouette is dominated by two main towers rising above the stylobate.

Both towers have a functional purpose, and their plastic solutions reference the construction techniques used to build mausoleums during the Middle Ages (The Tower Saraman-Kosa, 11th century, Mausoleum of Dombauyl, 8-9th centuries), following the example of the corrugated surfaces of the domes of Babaji-Khatun and Zhoshi-Khan, 10-11th centuries (Glaudinov, 1999). At the same time, each of them is metaphorically imbued with regional archetypes and significant elements associated with identity (Baitenov *et al.*, 2019).

The spatial arrangement of the two main towers of the complex was designed by the author with the aim of emphasizing the individual semantic significance and artistic value of each tower within the overall burial complex. The tower above the burial of Abay Kunanbayev, thirty-two and a half meters high, with a corrugated base and a multifaceted dome-shaped top, is characterized by its monumental and grandeur appearance (Figure 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d). The solid, sculpted silhouette of the monument creates a sense of steadfastness and calm to the viewer. The artist wanted to highlight Abay's importance as a great poet and thinker for the Kazakh people, and as a respected mentor and teacher to his followers, including Shakarim, his nephew. For the same reason, the tower above Shakarim Kudaiberdiyev's grave is one meter shorter than the original design. Before the reconstruction, the tower above Abay's grave was surrounded by small cone-shaped forms symbolizing the poet's followers (Figure 1a).

The tower above Shakarim Kudaiberdiev's burial place is topped with a pyramid-shaped dome with prominent edges (Figure 1e). The fragmented silhouette of the tower with a plastically stressed pyramid is contrasted with the monolithic completeness of the image of the Abay's volume. Drama and emotional expressiveness are introduced by the author in the silhouette of the second volume. According to the author's idea, the tower over Shakarim's burial is a metaphor for the tragic life story of Abay's nephew and pupil, based on the facts of repression, execution and hiding of his remains in a steppe well.

Inclusion in the cultural, historical and sociological context

The main author of the project, Bek Ibrayev, who had a deep understanding of the cultural context in terms of history, philosophy, traditions and culture, demonstrated his vision through the expression of identity. This was achieved through the synthesis of his accumulated knowledge, experience, and creative thought, as well as his philosophical depth.

According to the author's concept, the stylobate of the complex consists of three tiers which correspond to three levels of the universe in Kazakh cosmogony. The identification with the image of the structure of the universe, the world mountain, expresses a system of mythological images, where the lower tier is the underworld, the middle tier is life on the surface of the earth, and the upper tier is the higher world of spirits or the Creator (Gabitov, 2008; Ibraev, 1980). The architect's active use of vertical or conical-pyramidal volumes is also linked to cultural meanings: the tower is a sacred symbol, representing the Kazakh people's Tree of Life - Baiterek. According to Ibrayev, towers have mystical properties, that contribute to "(...) fertility, wealth, protection from disease (...), performing the functions of the World Tree (...)". They also play an important role in performing magical rituals to connect with spirits - Aruakhs (Ibraev, 2017). The corner towers at the four corners of the complex's base have sacred meanings that relate to the image of the nomadic world - the World Mountain, the four directions, among other elements.

B. Ibrayev's point of view on the traditional use of local seashell in the cladding of Kazakhstani buildings is significant. In an interview with Murat Auezov, a Kazakhstan cultural scientist, the architect supports the theory that there is an ancestral spirit present in limestone or shell rocks. Thus, B. Ibrayev believes that the white Mangystau limestone-shell can be used in the complex's cladding as a transcendental material, representing the remains of "millions of deceased beings" and carrying the program established by the ancient ancestors - the Aruakhs.

The use of this material is thus dictated by the Kazakh cosmogonic worldview and shamanistic traditions, where the well-being of the living depends on the patronage of the previous generation and "(...) the power of a ritual performed near water, some kind of stone, especially limestone (...)" (From an interview on 2 July 2018) (Ibrayev, 2018).

Thus, the memorial complex has become a place of honor for the outstanding representatives of Kazakh spirituality and culture and a symbol of national identity. Its majestic and unwavering image embodies the philosophical and poetic genius of such outstanding figures as Abay and Shakarim, imbued with the equal-sized creative genius of the architect-philosopher Bek Ibrayev.

Figure 1. Abay and Shakarim Memorial Complex



Note : general view (a, b, c), view of the Abay Tower (d), view of the mosque (left) and amphitheater (f), view of the Shakarim Tower (e).
Photo by authors.

Saken Narynov: “ALGIR” Memorial and Museum Complex in Memory of Victims of Political Repression

The emotionally charged and symbolically rich project of the “ALGIR” Memorial and Museum Complex in Memory of Victims of Political Repression (Central Kazakhstan, 2007) became a platform for the testing of innovative ideas of another architect-philosopher, Saken Narynov.

The construction of the memorial and museum complex in memory of the victims of political repression in the village of Akmol, known as “ALGIR”, is linked to the tragic pages of the region’s history. In the 1930s, during the period of political repression in the Soviet Union, a camp for the wives of “traitors to the motherland”, was located at this site. Here, female relatives of public and political figures, representatives of culture and science from the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan, who were considered “enemies of the people,” were imprisoned (Figure 2).

The complex includes: a museum building in the shape of a truncated cone, the Arch of Sorrow, the Alley of Memory, the Square of Memory, allegorical sculptures, burial mounds, reconstructions of the prisoners’ living quarters (barracks), as well as stands with the names of victims of repression and fragments of their memories (Memorial and Museum).

Compositional features

The composition of the ALGIR complex is based on the principle of linearity, with a clear axis running from the entrance arch to the central museum building. Each element of the complex is revealed sequentially along the central axis. Upon entering the complex, visitors are greeted by the Arch of Sorrow, a portal-like structure, through which the concrete streamlined structure of the museum building which seems to grow out of the ground. In the foreground, there is a square space with symbolic bas-reliefs and allegorical sculptures dedicated to the women held in the prison camp.

Artistic and imaginative interpretation of space

The Arch of Sorrow, as the entrance to the complex, sets the path for visitors to the museum (Figure 2a). Its design, combining the silhouette of a nomad's yurt with a domed structure and a lattice covering, is a response to the emotional experience of visitors as they pass through the arch. A yurt is a traditional type of Kazakh (nomads) dwelling that has been used for centuries due to its adaptability to climatic conditions and living needs.

The architecture of the museum building is designed as a simple geometric shape of a truncated cone, a closed structure without windows on the facades, storing materials about the stories and experiences of people during the Soviet period (Figure 2b). This shape of the structure can be seen as a reference to burial mounds, sacred shrines traditional to the architecture of the local peoples, particularly the ancient inhabitants of the area, such as the Saks.

Since the Bronze Age and pre-Islamic periods, cultures of the Saks, Usuns, and Kangls tribes, among others, have developed a widespread practice of building burial mounds in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Southern Siberia, and the Urals. This period is known as the “kurgan (burial) period” in the works of Kazakhstan scientists (Glaudinov, 1999; Baitenov & Tuyakayeva, 2025). The form, based on the concept of the center, the “world mountain”, obtained by rotating an arc around the central axis in the form of dome-like structure with a hole at the top, or a conical shape, has been considered to be one of the basic spatial archetypes in Central Asia and Kazakhstan from the archaic period (Baitenov, 2007).

Inclusion in the cultural, historical and sociological context

The deep conceptual foundation of the Museum and Memorial Complex is built on the architectural representation of sorrow, eternal memory, and their transmission through associative images and forms. S. Narynov's original method of contrasting two equivalent symbols and images made it possible to intensify the emotional tone of the architectural space.

Thus, the image of the high Arch of Sorrow corresponds to the shape of a yurt. In Kazakh culture, the yurt has a symbolic meaning that represents the sacredness of life, tradition, and family. This type of dwelling as a reduced version of the universe in the Kazakh worldview represents the cycle of life and the spiritual connection between man and nature and the cosmos (Nurdubaeva, 1997). A visitor to the museum walks under a dome made of spatial elements that create images of *uyks* and *kereges*, the traditional Kazakh mobile dwellings. The dome refers to the symbol of the sun. At the same time, the transparent covering of the monolithic arch could be associated with prison bars.

The architecture of the museum is based on a dualistic philosophy that reflects the Kazakh culture: the earthly element is represented by the austere exterior, while the sacred element is represented by the interior, which promotes memory and spirituality. The light color of the cladding contrasts with the dark color of the Arch of Sorrow. The shape of the unfinished cone-shaped building hints to traditional dwellings and symbolizes the vertical axis of the world. It also represents a profound interpretation of death and the sacred space associated with burial mounds. The architecture of the museum proposed by S. Narynov is a metaphor for memory, silent stillness and collective pain about the tragic historical experience.

Along with the symbolism of the cone shape, color plays an important role. The light sandy-ochre color of the building's facade correlates with the warm shade's characteristic of traditional architecture in the region, creating a familiar association with the color of the steppe landscape

in the viewer's mind. It enhances the impact of the space's imaginative content on the viewer's emotional state.

The interior of the central space of the museum lobby is designed as an atrium with access to natural light at the top of a truncated cone. The interior elements of the lobby, where the museum exhibition begins, are characterized by a particular richness of meaning and set the tone for the exhibition content, shaping the visitor's emotional mood. The installation located on the upper tier of the atrium immediately attracts the viewer's attention upon entering as a focal point (Figure 2c).

An allegorical sculptural group of birds trapped in a net and seeking a way to freedom hangs from the ceiling. The shape of the net is similar to other works by Saken Narynov, expressing the ideas of infinity space and the passing of time through a Möbius strip – the illusion of the existence of two parallels (Abdrassilova & Aukhadiyeva, 2021; Reznikova, 2023).

Here, the metaphor of a dichotomous world is presented in the form of contrasting images: imprisonment versus hope for liberation. Below, directly beneath the installation, which represents despair and hopelessness, is a sculptural composition with a reversed meaning - a plastic symbol of hope in the form of a flower that breaks through a split pyramidal structure. This symbol refers to the archetypal "world mountain" or memorial mound, tombstone (Figure 2d).

The principle of dualism has been used in the design of the long tunnel-corridor that serves as the entrance to the museum. The corridor leads the visitor down a gently inclined plane into the building. The walls of the corridor are adorned with bas-reliefs visualizations of historical facts about the history of the local people. This expressive architectural technique creates a sense of anticipation and enhances the emotional experience of the visitor as they enter the building (Figure 2e). The architect's vision is that after the visitor completes the tour, they will gradually walk along the sloping surface of the tunnel-corridor, and reflexively look up towards the exit. On the ceiling, the viewer sees an allegorical composition consisting of a continuous line of *yurts-kerege* (a metaphor for the path to life) and figures of birds breaking free from prison bars and flying toward the light.

Figure 2. "ALGIR" Memorial and Museum Complex in Memory of Victims of Political Repression

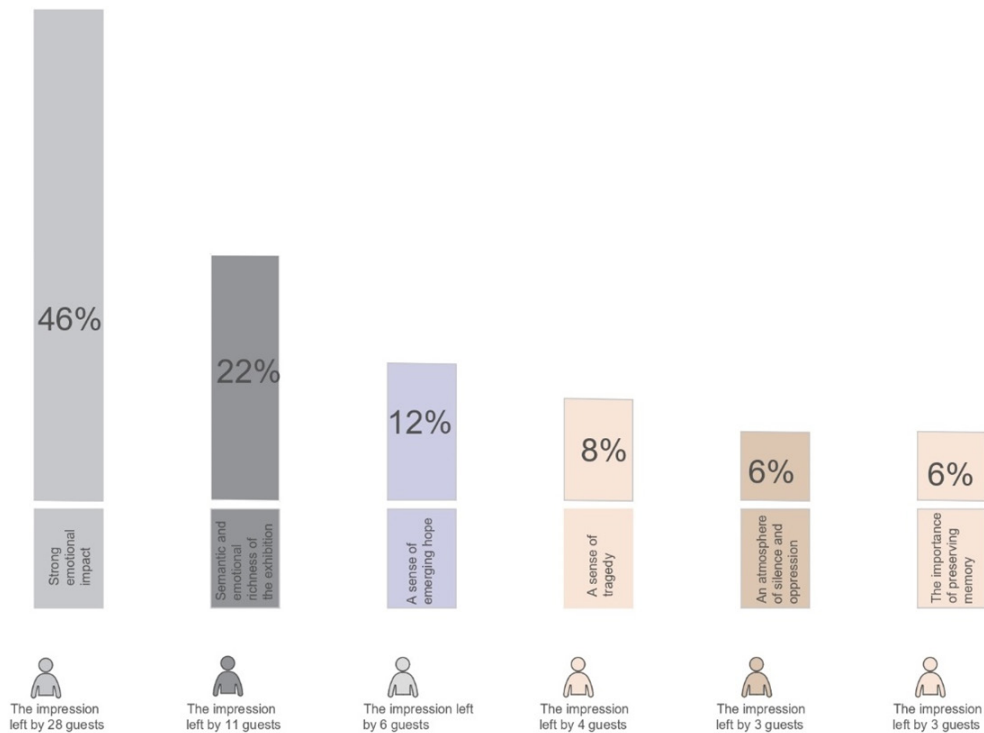


Note: Arch of Sorrow (a), Museum building - view through the Arch of Sorrow (b), view of the atrium's top (c), view of the atrium's floor (d), view of the main entrance (e), view of the exit (f).
Photo by authors.

Results of a visitor survey with data on the impact of both the exhibition materials and the architectural image and forms on their psychological and emotional state are pictured in Figure 3. The diagram shows that most of the fifty respondents noted an increased impact on their emotional state (46%). Eight percent felt a sense of tragedy, while 12% noted a feeling of relief upon leaving the museum.

Thus, the design concept of the Museum and Memorial Complex was based on the author's approaches, which contribute to enhancing the drama of perception and emphasizing the magnitude of the tragedy, reflecting the diverse creative universe of architect Saken Narynov.

Figure 3. Results of a survey on the impact of the museum's architecture on visitors' emotional experiences

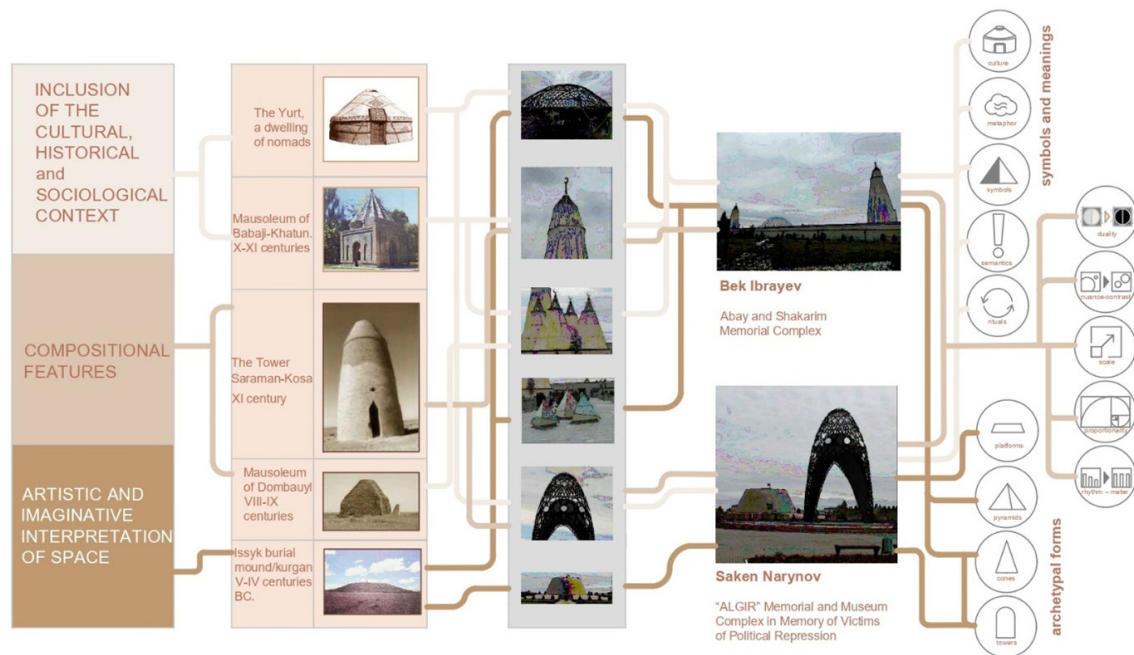


Source: own elaboration.

Results and discussion

Each of the objects considered is an example of its own interpretation of traditions, innovation and experimentation, based on meanings and figurative associations, united by the architect's philosophical views. The authors' personal vision, based on the rejection of direct references to traditional forms and elements and the use of associative imagery, determines the dynamics of the development of critical regionalism (Bechhoefer, 1991; Danibekova, 2023). Critical regionalism is built through a simultaneous focus on the individual, their belonging to a particular region, and their sense of place through the architect's creative reinterpretation and critical perception of cultural and geographical contexts (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 1991; Frampton, 1983). Thus, in the projects of B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov, critical regionalism is based on architectural concepts cultivated through a careful reinterpretation of material and spiritual heritage, local signs and symbols, and the 'spirit of place' through an original generalisation proposed by the authors. It is clear that the roles of B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov in expressing regional identity are equally significant, and the scale of their contribution to the search for a new language in modern Kazakh architecture is comparable in magnitude (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The role of architects-philosophers in the search for a new language in contemporary Kazakh architecture



Source: own elaboration.

We have conducted a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences in approaches to shaping, stylization and associativity, as well as reference to history, traditions, context and improvisation with a philosophical root.

Similarities in compositional approaches

The common basis of the work of B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov can be described as compositional skills which are not inferior in professionalism. Both architects had a keen sense of unity and integrity – the essential features of architectural composition. The main elements and parts of the Abay and Shakarim Memorial Complex and the Algiers Memorial and “ALGIR” Memorial and Museum Complex in Memory of Victims of Political Repression are arranged in a specific sequence, creating a balanced and harmonious image.

The architectural composition is made up of regularly ordered, interconnected contrasting, nuanced or identical ratios (Ikonnikov & Stepanov, 2016). The authors of the objects under consideration actively used means of ordering and establishing regular interrelationships between all parts of the structures:

- Proportions. Proportionality between parts and their elements is preserved. In the Abay and Shakarim Complex, the system of proportions, known since ancient times (Mikhalovskiy, 2014), corresponds both to the proportional solutions of the main towers and to the ratios between the main dominant elements and secondary elements in the form of cones and pyramids. A similar method of proportionality and ranking between the components of the composition can be seen in the “ALGIR” complex, where the sacred core of the space and the accompanying ensemble environment are clearly defined.
- Scale. The proportionality of the dominant elements of the complexes in relation to the environment and human scale are carefully considered by the authors. The semantic, sacred and artistic significance of the towers of the Abay and Shakarim and the Arch of Sorrow of the “ALGIR” complex are clearly expressed. They are visible from a great distance and dominate the surrounding space. This technique is enhancing the monumentality of the memorial sites.

- Nuance, contrast. These qualitative characteristics influence aesthetic indicators, ensuring proportionality and rhythm, and emphasizing the functional and semantic content of objects. For example, the subtle difference in height between the towers of the Abay and Shakarim Complex simultaneously focuses both the hierarchy of the buried, elevating the importance of Abay's figure for culture and society, and their spiritual and kinship closeness. The contrast is expressed in the symbolism of the shapes of the towers' tops as a metaphor for the life of each poet.

S. Narynov uses the method of contrasting relationships in the "ALGIR" complex to convey the eternal struggle (life and death, time and space, light and darkness, good and evil) that permeates the conceptual idea of the entire complex - an allegory of crimes against humanity. Everywhere, polar opposites are used symbolically: from the arch (monolithic and spatial, black and white) to the museum building, from the memorial elements around the perimeter of the site to the interior details.

- Symmetry and dissymmetry. The pronounced central-axial composition of both complexes, with identical parts arranged symmetrically along a line, as if "strung" on it and gradually revealing themselves to the viewer, lends these objects a sense of monumentality and solemnity. It is worth noting the partial asymmetry in the Abay and Shakarim complex, often seen in traditional religious architecture, and providing some compositional flexibility.

Methods of artistic and imaginative interpretation of space

Kazakh architects B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov used a number of formal and compositional techniques in their work, based on the simple geometry of archetypal forms such as platforms, towers, pyramids and cones. They reinterpret traditional forms and elements, such as domes, integrating them into contemporary designs and adapting them to new conditions (Shadieva & Ibraev, 2019).

Method of accounting for cultural, historical and sociological context

The Abay and Shakarim Memorial Complex is a deeply symbolic architectural object with significant symbolic, semantic and artistic value in the regional context. It is a multifaceted creation by Bek Ibrayev, whose creative approach has made it possible to interpret symbols and rethink the worldview of the Kazakh people through a deep analysis of history, tradition, culture and philosophy.

In the architecture of the "ALGIR" Memorial and Museum Complex in Memory of Victims of Political Repression, Saken Narynov used symbolism and associations linked to local cultural codes and historical events. This allowed the architecture of the complex to be integrated into the context of regional identity by juxtaposition of symbols with a philosophical background: life (yurt, existence) - death (memory, memorial). The architect sought to show the interconnection between life and death, beginning and end, time and space. Through allegorical sculptures (birds, flowers, people) he solved the tasks of visualizing the history of the region and enhancing the emotional impact of the museum complex - i.e. the direct functional purpose of the object.

This approach by the architect is consistent with the phenomenology of architecture (Norberg-Schulz) and correlates with the concepts of P. Nora and H. Lefebvre: architectural objects are viewed as spaces of memory, social meaning and lived experience, and the interaction of image and context forms the holistic identity of a place (Nora, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991).

Thus, despite the equal level of professional skill of B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov, their principles of design and approaches to form creation in the search for identity are represented by different methods and conceptual foundations. Each of them has their own research direction and style. Their unique perspectives and individual methods contributed to the creation of unique images, but their ideas still intersected in regional architecture. S. Narynov based his philosophy on the interconnection of parallel opposites, combining architecture with science: he tried to create not just artistically expressive objects, but complex technical inventions based on mathematical concepts. B. Ibraev worked with the concept of harmony between architecture and space, based on the interaction between man and nature. The architect's projects reflect metaphors of two worlds, spaces as existential transitional zones. In B. Ibrayev's work, architecture acts as a mediator between collective memory and the visitor's contemporary experience.

Conclusions

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century in world architecture were marked by a 'global mainstream' that sparked debates about regionalism, symbolism, and cultural identity. The analysis of the works of Kazakh architects fits logically into this discourse, showing the expansion of discussions beyond the Western-centric paradigm (L. Lefaivre, A. Tzonis, K. Frampton) and including new regions, in particular Kazakhstan, in the orbit of scientific research. Using the example of projects by two architects-thinkers, philosophers and bearers of local identity, the study shows that the Kazakh architectural context is capable of demonstrating regionalism not as a stylistic adaptation, but as a unique philosophical and cultural strategy based on the deep archetypes of nomadic civilization, the mythopoetic of space and the sacred geography of the steppe.

A study of the distinctive features of Bek Ibrayev and Saken Narynov's work revealed both common threads in their professional activities and different approaches to working with architectural space, based on each architect's unique philosophy and individual vision of regional identity. Bek Ibrayev incorporated national symbols (circle, centre, vertical) into contemporary architectural language, demonstrating how symbolism can function not in a decorative but in a structural and spatial sense. This reinforces the international debate on the acceptability and productivity of symbolism in contemporary architecture, contrasting it with superficial postmodernist references. Saken Narynov, who worked at the intersection of architecture, art and philosophy, contributed to the expansion of regionalism towards conceptual practice. His installations focus on the loss of 'Kazakh identity' in the context of globalisation and technocratic urbanism, thereby including the Kazakhstani experience in the global discourse. Thus, the works of B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov demonstrate that regional architecture can be theoretically rich and universally significant, rather than secondary to global trends.

The comparative analysis revealed different approaches to working with architectural space based on each architect's unique philosophy. Based on an analysis of the work of B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov, several potential areas for further research can be identified:

- comparative studies of regionalism: comparing the Kazakhstani experience with architectural practices in Central Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, where the search for forms of regional identity is also relevant;
- post-Soviet urbanism and identity: studying the role of architecture in shaping the cultural identity of cities in the context of the transition from the Soviet modernist paradigm to nationally oriented models of development;
- philosophy of space and architectural semiotics: analysis of symbols, archetypes, and metaphors in architecture.

B. Ibrayev and S. Narynov are architects with a developed cultural sensitivity, conceptualists representing the type of architect-thinker for whom design is not only a professional but also a cultural and philosophical practice.

An analysis of their work is important in the search for regional identity and a new language in the architecture of modern Kazakhstan. In the context of global urbanism, their approaches make it possible to:

- identify the mechanisms of regional identity formation through worldview and spatial thinking;
- understand how architecture can serve as a mediator between tradition and modernity, collective memory and the future development of the city;
- consider the city not only as a functional system, but as a cultural text saturated with symbols, meanings and rituals.

In a broader field of research, their work demonstrates that regional identity is not a closed locality, but an active participant in global dialogue, capable of developing alternative models of architectural development and the urban environment it shapes.

Acknowledgements

This study is based on the results of the completed grant project “Regional identity as a factor of sustainable development of the independent Kazakhstan architecture in the context of globalization” IRN AP19680138, funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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How to cite this article:

Danibekova, E. et al. (2026). Regional identity and conceptual depth in the creativity of modern Kazakh architects-philosophers: Dialogue between form, image and meaning. *CIDADES, Comunidades e Territórios*, 52, e20261143472. <https://doi.org/10.15847/cct.43472>

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