



Reading Denizli Central Bank as a Mediterranean Artifact by Cengiz Bektaş

Cengiz Bektaş'ın Denizli Merkez Bankası Binasını Bir Akdeniz Eseri Olarak Okumak

ABSTRACT

Cengiz Bektaş, a prominent modern architect who practiced in Turkey, regarded architecture as a form of cultural production rather than as an autonomous artistic practice; in line with this conception, his architectural practice is connected to his identities as a writer and poet. Besides, his identity that he defined according to the culture and geography he was born, live and conduct his profession, which is being Anatolian and thus Mediterranean, provides him the ground upon which he produced culturally driven works encompassing architecture. Bektaş embraced both modern architecture and an architectural approach specific to the geography and the region. However, this article does not consider Bektaş merely as an architect with regionalist or vernacular concerns; rather it evaluates him as a modern architect, whose association with the Mediterranean constitutes a culturally unique embodiment of modernity and who draws inspiration from the local context. This article, using a qualitative methodology, examines Bektaş's architectural philosophy, which is rooted in Mediterranean cultural heritage, through an analysis of the Denizli Central Bank building, which was designed in alignment with the architectural and cultural legacy shaped by the geography and traditions of Anatolia and the Mediterranean. In line with the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey's goal to contribute to the development of urban culture through the remarkable designs of its branch buildings located in the city centers, the Denizli branch building reflects a modern and Mediterranean identity, taking into account the climatic and cultural context.

Keywords: The Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey Denizli Branch, Cengiz Bektaş, Modern architecture, Mediterranean architecture, Locality.

ÖZET

Türkiye'de çağdaş mimari alanında öne çıkan bir mimar olan Cengiz Bektaş, mimarlığı özerk bir sanatsal pratik olarak değil, kültürel bir üretim biçimi olarak görmüştür; bu çerçevede, Bektaş'ın mimarlık pratiği yazar ve şair kimlikleriyle bağlantılıdır. Ayrıca, doğduğu, yaşadığı ve mesleğini icra ettiği kültüre ve coğrafyaya göre tanımladığı kimliği, yani Anadolu ve dolayısıyla Akdenizli kimliği, mimarlığı da kapsayan geniş kültürel üretimi için ona bir zemin sağlamıştır. Bektaş, modern mimarlığı ve aynı zamanda coğrafyaya ve yerel özelliklere yönelik mimari yaklaşımı benimsemiştir. Ancak bu makale, Bektaş'ı sadece yerel ve bölgesel coğrafyaya ile iklim faktörlerine duyarlı bir mimar olarak ele almakla kalmaz; onun Akdeniz ile olan bağlantısının, modernizmin kültürel açıdan özgün bir yansıması olduğunu ve yerel bağlamdan beslenen bir modern mimar olarak incelenmesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Bu makale, nitel bir metodoloji kullanarak, Anadolu ve Akdeniz coğrafyası ve gelenekleri doğrultusunda şekillenen ve mimari ile kültürel miras bilincini yansıtan bir yapı olarak tasarlanan Denizli Merkez Bankası binasını inceleyerek, Bektaş'ın Akdeniz kültürel mirasına dayanan mimari felsefesinin izlerini analiz etmektedir. Türkiye Cumhuriyet Merkez Bankası şehir merkezlerinde yer alan şube binalarında nitelikli tasarımlar aracılığıyla kent kültürünün gelişimine katkıda bulunma hedefi doğrultusunda şube yapıları için yarışmalar düzenlemiş veya tanınmış mimarların tasarımlarını istemiştir. Denizli şube binası; Cengiz Bektaş'ın Akdenizli kültürel birikimi yansıtan ve coğrafi-iklimsel özelliklere uygun tasarım anlayışı doğrultusunda, modern ve Akdenizli bir kimliği ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye Cumhuriyet Merkez Bankası Denizli Şubesi; Cengiz Bektaş; Modern mimarlık; Akdeniz mimarlığı; Yerellik.

INTRODUCTION

In this article Denizli branch of the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey will be interpreted in the framework of Anatolian-Mediterranean culture in which Cengiz Bektaş developed his architectural formation and practice. Bektaş is considered a cultural agent influential in architectural production in Turkey, by means of his sustained investigations of Anatolian and Mediterranean culture and traditions. Bektaş also participated in the Blue Anatolianists' Blue Voyages, an experience that further strengthened his engagement with the landscapes, settlements, and everyday life of Anatolia, while deepening his appreciation of its ancient cultural legacy (Akyol et al., 2019).

Melike Akyol¹

How to Cite This Article

Akyol, M. (2026). Reading Denizli Central Bank as a Mediterranean Artifact by Cengiz Bektaş. *International Social Mentality and Researcher Thinkers Journal*, (Issn:2630-631X) 12(5), 590-601. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23061853>

Arrival: 31 July 2026

Published: 30 September 2026

Social Mentality And Researcher Thinkers is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

¹ Asst. Prof. Dr., Gazi University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Ankara, Turkey. ORCID: 0000-0002-2365-7166



Throughout his career, Bektaş conducted extensive field investigations and surveys across Anatolia, documenting local building traditions, settlements, and everyday cultural practices with Blue Anatolianists, later with his colleagues and students. These investigations formed the basis of his research on Halk Yapı Sanatı (The Art of Folk Building), through which he made a lasting contribution to the documentation and interpretation of Anatolia's architectural heritage (Bektaş, 2017). The findings of these studies were first published as articles in *Mimarlık*, one of the leading architectural journals of the time, later published as books; and Bektaş continued with his weekly essays in the newspaper *Evrensel*, where he remained a regular contributor on Anatolian culture until his death in March 2020.

In this article, first, the historiography of modern architecture will be briefly discussed; and later alternative discussions on modernisms as a result of the critiques to early twenties modernity and its dominant International Style will be addressed. Among the critiques, regionalism and Goldhagen's notion of "situated modernism" are closely connected to the local sensibilities that arose in the context of Turkey, such as "Anatolian regionalism" or "true regionalism". Mediterranean modernity is also highlighted as a form of modern, regional and vernacular architecture focusing on the Mediterranean geographical and cultural conditions.

These discussions around locality and modernity will suggest the conceptual framework for this article's proposition that Cengiz Bektaş designs architectural artifacts of Mediterranean architecture in line with his comprehension of Anatolian culture. Thus, the method of this study is to explore Bektaş's architecture as a cultural production; and in particular, reading Denizli Central Bank as an artifact representing Mediterranean culture and identity. Described as a "locally situated modernist" architect (Akyol, 2019) – with reference to Goldhagen's conception – Bektaş construed cultural, geographical and climatic codes as initiators for generating his Anatolian-Mediterranean architecture. Consequently, Denizli Central Bank will be evaluated as an example of Bektaş's Mediterranean architecture; in which he embedded Mediterranean codes into the building, simultaneously revealing his Anatolian concepts.

The literature includes similar studies that interpret Bektaş's architecture from a local and cultural perspective, as well as studies analyzing other branches of the Central Bank. Akyol et al. (2019) discuss Cengiz Bektaş's discourse on Anatolian identity through the practice of travel. Örmecioglu and Akan (2022) analyze Bektaş's Aga Khan Award-winning Olbia Social Center through his emphasis on the Mediterranean identity. Altınışık (2022) examines the Kangotan House as a case study, raising questions about Bektaş's persona as a poet-architect. In her study investigating Turkey's contemporary Mediterranean modern architecture within the framework of Mediterranean architectural elements and cultural landscapes, Kütükçüoğlu (2022) covers certain buildings, including some works by Cengiz Bektaş. Çalışkan and Aydın (2024) conducted a typological analysis of the Central Bank's branches in Bursa, Konya, Denizli, Van, and İzmir—which incorporate local and modern architectural elements in their designs. The Kayseri branch, designed during the same period, differs from these five branches in that it contains references to the International Style (Sönmez, 2021). In line with all these preceding studies, the contribution of this study to the literature is to interpret the Denizli Central Bank as an example that particularly represents the Mediterranean identity, as revealed by Cengiz Bektaş.

MODERNISM: NEGOTIATING THE UNIVERSAL AND THE LOCAL

The International Style of the early 1920's was the prevailing representation of modernism in the early 20th century. The International Style: Architecture since 1922 by Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson became influential in the spread of International Style, which defined modern architecture through new construction methods, industrial materials, spatial openness, the rejection of ornament, and a limited vocabulary of formal features such as flat roofs, curtain walls, asymmetrical compositions, and ribbon windows (Mallgrave, 2005: 298-300).

Europe's recovery following World War II was made possible by the aid the United States provided in the early 1950s under the Marshall Plan; at the same time, modernism was re-imported from the United States, along with new cultural values. With the advancement of technology, production was replaced by consumption (Ockman, 1993: 16). During this period, an abstract aesthetic became prominent in art and architecture. The modern architecture defined by Hitchcock and Johnson in the 1930s through their formal approaches turned into a true International Style in the 1950s as architecture was abstracted from its specific contexts (Ockman, 1993: 18).

However, as Joan Ockman (1993: 13) pointed out, although modernist architecture was dominant during the 1950s, it was also being intensely criticized, especially for its claim of universality. Instead of showing that one architectural language could be applicable everywhere, the postwar dissemination of modern architecture

revealed the impossibility of architectural universality. Kenneth Frampton (2007: 248) argues that, the International Style presents a deceptive homogeneity through its “cubist mode”; as the planar form responds merely to specific climatic and cultural conditions. For this reason, International Style could not become truly universal, since if the different cultural, climatic, or economic conditions could not support the new light-weight technology, it only becomes a formalistic representation on the surface. Consequently, in response to criticism of the formal constraints imposed by the International Style, other modern approaches or discourses began to emerge, such as regionalism, critical regionalism, or the more recently arrived situated modernism.

The rise of regionalism after the 1950s marked a significant change within modernism rather than a rejection of modern architecture. The most important fact about regional architecture is that it cannot be considered separately from the universal. According to Mumford, sociologists assert that no cultures have ever been “self-sufficient” or “self-contained” in terms of time and space; and this is why every regional culture also includes a universal aspect (Mumford, 2007: 100). Regional identity, therefore, is not the opposite of universality, but one of its conditions.

As Frampton (1983: 17) suggests, the persistent tension between civilization and culture reflects two complementary dimensions of architectural production. While civilization privileges instrumental reasoning and technological development, culture gives meaning to architecture through its relationship with place, memory, and lived experience. The issue with early 20th-century modern architecture lies not in its technological goals, but in reducing architecture to a universal formal system detached from its cultural environment.

Regionalism consequently proposed neither isolation nor nostalgia. In this sense, the relationship between the modern and the local should not be viewed as a strict opposition. On the contrary, as Aycı and Boyacıoğlu (2012) note, concepts such as context, culture, place, and time mediate between these seemingly contradictory positions, enriching both the language and the scope of architecture. They emphasize that Lewis Mumford’s statement, “the modern movement was, at its core, regional,” does not highlight a distinction between the local and the universal, but rather encourages a reconceptualization of the built environment through the inseparable relationship between the local and the universal.

This perspective finds a particularly productive historiographical framework in Sarah Williams Goldhagen’s concept of “situated modernism”. Goldhagen (2000) argues that a fundamental aspect of postwar modern architecture must be understood not only in terms of its stylistic characteristics but also through elements such as its relationship to space, history, and society. Rather than rejecting the achievements of modernity, situated modernists sought to reconcile the dynamism of modern life with the human need for cultural continuity, social belonging, and a sense of place. Their approach to architecture aimed to situate its users within a social, historical, and geographical context, recognizing that modern individuals experience architecture not through an abstract and universal space, but through specific cultural environments.

Goldhagen’s interpretation is significant because it shifts attention away from architecture as a visual style toward architecture as a cultural discourse. As she argues, the defining characteristic of situated modernism is not a recognizable formal vocabulary but a particular way of understanding the relationship between architecture and its social context (Goldhagen, 2000: 319). Consequently, situated modernism should not be interpreted as another architectural style succeeding the International Style. Instead, it offers a different conception of modernity itself—one that recognizes locality not as the opposite of the universal but as the condition through which modern architecture gains cultural significance.

From the perspective of regionalism, which rejects the assumption that universality depends on formal standardization and also refuses to equate locality with historical imitation, situated modernism emerges as a form of cultural reconciliation between universal aspirations and locally grounded realities. Within this framework, situated modernism offers a dynamic way to reinterpret regional architectural practices as alternative articulations of the modern project. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding architectural cultures, such as that of postwar Turkey, where engagement with local conditions did not represent resistance to modernity, but rather a unique way of producing it.

Modernism: The Context of Turkey

The transformation of modern architectural discourse found a parallel trajectory in Turkey. As Meltem Gürel (2016: 4) argues, the principal distinction between the architecture of the 1950s and that of the mid-1960s and 1970s lay in the changing socio-political and intellectual context rather than in stylistic preferences alone. Influenced by broader international debates, Turkish architects increasingly explored alternative architectural approaches. These explorations included the fragmentation of the international paradigm, renewed interest in

plastic and organic expression, regional and historical references, and the influence of Team 10, Louis Kahn, Japanese Metabolism, and New Brutalism (Gürel, 2016: 4). Although these tendencies differed formally, they collectively reflected a growing discontent with the stylistic ideas of the International Style and a search for more context-sensitive forms of modern architectural production.

This diverse environment extended beyond formal experimentation. As Bozdoğan and Akcan (2012: 171-172) note, architectural debates in the 1960s and 1970s became increasingly concerned with wide-ranging social issues and situated architecture within the political and cultural concerns of the time. The emphasis on users, context, and the specific conditions of the country reflected an extensive international rethinking of modern architecture, in which the architect's social responsibility became inseparable from questions of place and cultural identity. Rather than being a nostalgic return to tradition, regionalism emerged as one of several efforts to reformulate modern architecture through a closer engagement with local conditions. Correspondingly, Yücel (2005: 130, 136) identifies organic architecture, New Brutalism, and other formally experimental approaches as parallel developments that collectively contributed to what he characterizes as a "New Regionalism." Despite their formal diversity, these approaches shared a common ambition to move beyond the rigid geometries and abstract universalism associated with the International Style.

The most influential theoretical expression of this viewpoint in Turkey was developed by Doğan Kuban and Bülent Özer. As Bozdoğan and Akcan (2012: 185-187) indicate, both architects argued for a "true regionalism" that rejected not only the uncritical adoption of international forms but also the formalism found in traditional regional architecture. Instead, they advocated a conception of modern architecture grounded in contemporary social, cultural, and environmental conditions. According to Yücel, Kuban developed the discourse of Anatolian Regionalism by examining structures through their relationships to themselves and their cultural environments. Yücel emphasizes that Kuban regards this discourse as "the true path of modern architecture" through "an interpretation of environmental conditions" (Yücel, 2005: 130). Anatolian Regionalism may also be interpreted as a form of "situated modernism", since it locates modern architecture within the unique cultural and environmental conditions of Anatolia and does not merely seek to reproduce local forms.

These debates in the context of Turkey should be viewed not as isolated cultural and geographical discussions, but as part of the broader historiography of diverse modernisms that reshaped architectural discourse after the Second World War. Rather than opposing the universal and the local, Turkish architects increasingly explored how modern architecture could emerge through their continual negotiation. It is within this intellectual framework that the architectural practice of Cengiz Bektaş can be understood—not simply as an example of regional architecture, but as a form of modernism grounded in the cultural, social, geographical and environmental realities of Anatolia.

Yet, in order to fully comprehend Bektaş's architectural formation within the context of Anatolia, it needs to be considered in conjunction with the Mediterranean context; for a considerable number of Bektaş's architectural works are physically located in the Aegean and Mediterranean regions of Anatolia. In fact, in an abstract sense, his architectural thinking has its roots in these regions, since Denizli, as one of the Aegean-Mediterranean cities, is his birthplace.

Modernism: Mediterranean Architecture

As formerly discussed, the notion of Anatolian Regionalism conceived as a mode of modern production. In this framework, vernacular structures of Anatolia were regarded as enduring sources of humanist and universal architectural knowledge, not as historical models to be imitated. As examples of modern architecture, their universality was different from the formal homogenization of International Style. This interpretation is similar to the Bernard Rudofsky's vernacular architecture and to the Mediterranean modernity ideal proposed by Josep Lluís Sert and the Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture (GATCPAC) (Vergara and Pizza, 2021).

Rudofsky proposed vernacular architecture as an alternative to modern architecture in the 1964 exhibition "Architecture without Architects" that he curated at the Museum of Modern Art. Within the architectural intellectual environment of the time, this theme became noteworthy; anonymous, popular, or vernacular structures were regarded as authentic artifacts, because they were seemingly establishing direct and unmediated interaction between people and their surroundings. Rudofsky highlights the harmony of location, climate, and nature to people's life and wellbeing; arguing that vernacular provides this harmony by resisting the homogenizing tendencies of capitalist development and ethnocentric Western culture (Vergara and Pizza, 2021). Considering his conception, vernacular architecture appears as an "alternative", "multiple", or "other" modernities as defined by historians to refer to history of modern architecture, which is pluralistic, diverse,

and at times contradictory (Bozdoğan, 2009). Bozdoğan (2009: 18) in parallel, designates that the “Mediterranean Discourse” developed by Italian and Spanish architects became also the “other history” of modern architecture, which provided it a ground of research and publishing after long years of negligence. These definitions for modern architecture eventually indicate “situated architectures” that are bound to the tangible or intangible cultural and social features of people and life in an “unmediated” manner – in Rudofsky’s terms.

Sert maintains that the principles of modern architecture had already existed, as embedded within Mediterranean vernacular architecture. Before they had been technically codified through discovery of modern architecture by Nordic countries, they were present “spiritually” in its “styleless” Mediterranean building traditions. Modern architecture’s geometric forms, fundamentally influenced by Mediterranean, represent a return to the essential architectural values and pure forms (Vergara and Pizza, 2021). However, Mediterranean modernity is not solely limited to formal concerns; environmental aspects are the most valuable design considerations. In Italian architectural scene, the aspiration for a “Mediterranean Modernity (Mediterraneità)” is depicted by architectural features such as houses that rest firmly on the earth, opening up to the landscape through terraces, pergolas, or courtyards, and the walls of the ancient tradition of the Mediterranean– rather than houses which are on pilotis, confined within cubic boxes, and built with standard framing systems (Bozdoğan, 2009: 19). Correspondingly, Kütükçüoğlu (2022) emphasizes that the source of inspiration for modern architects drawn from the Mediterranean is not the “classical canons,” but rather the region’s natural and cultural geography.

READING CENGİZ BEKTAŞ’S MEDITERRANEAN MODERNITY

Cengiz Bektaş (1934-2020) was one of the leading figures of post-war Turkish architecture, whose architectural, literary, and intellectual production developed through a constant engagement with Anatolian culture. According to Bektaş, architecture was one form of cultural production among many. As an architect, poet, writer, and traveler, he regarded these roles as complementary forms of cultural production rather than distinct professional activities. His engagement with literature began at a very early age, with his first published writings appearing in a local journal in 1949. During his architectural education in Munich, he continued to write poetry and essays alongside his architectural studies (Akyol, 2019: 138). Likewise, his practice of travel began at an early age through his participation in scouting camps; this experience led him to adopt direct observation as a learning practice from which he would benefit throughout his life (Akyol et al., 2019). During the course of his career, architecture, literature, and travel developed in parallel, each becoming an integral component of his broader cultural practice.

Reflecting the extent of his architectural, cultural, and social contributions, Bektaş has been described by Ruşen Keleş (2023) as a “multifaceted intellectual”, by Öner Ciravoğlu (2023) as a “holistic intellectual”, and by Uğur Tanyeli as “a one-person army” (Boyut, 2001). A complementary perspective is offered by Altınışik (2022), who characterizes Bektaş as a “poet-architect,” highlighting the close relationship between his literary production and his architectural thought. Altınışik argues that this “poet-architect” persona should not be understood as an expression of poetic romanticism but rather as one grounded in realism, functionalism, and critical rationality. This interpretation builds upon Doğan Kuban’s earlier observation that Bektaş’s architecture ultimately sought the rational rather than the poetic. Kuban further associates this rationality with Bektaş’s disciplined architectural approach, emphasizing its pursuit of balance, tranquility, modesty, and human well-being (Boyut, 2001).

This perspective reveals that, for Bektaş, becoming an architect is inseparable from becoming a cultural intellectual who is deeply connected to the ancient legacy of Anatolia and who respects these lands as a living cultural landscape rather than merely a physical territory. He maintained that cultural identity, geography, memory are inseparable from built environment. Literature and practice, accordingly, became his primary means of learning the cultural values of Anatolia and practicing contemporary architecture that integrates the enduring tradition created by Anatolian culture (Akyol et al., 2019). He believed that anyone wishing to build for Anatolia must first come to know it by experiencing its diverse landscapes, settlements, and ways of life firsthand, thus his journeys across Turkey were motivated by a desire to understand both its ancient and contemporary cities in order to become “a person of this country” (Bektaş, 2010: 9).

Interpreting Bektaş’s architectural production requires positioning it within the broader intellectual tradition of Anatolian architecture and Bektaş’s role of intellectual architect. This article argues, however, that this framework remains incomplete unless Bektaş’s engagement with the Mediterranean is also taken into account. Bektaş was born in Denizli, a city in the Aegean region, where Mediterranean climate and culture prevail; Bektaş often emphasized his hometown because he viewed being from Denizli as an integral part of his

identity. Furthermore, the buildings Bektaş designed in Denizli, along with their architectural details, became pioneering examples for subsequent buildings in the city (Bektaş, 1987). Given its Anatolian and Mediterranean roots, it can be argued that Denizli initially instilled an Anatolian and Mediterranean identity in Bektaş.

According to Bektaş, similar to Sert, Anatolian architecture was inherently modern because it embodied values that he regarded as contemporary, humanist, and universal (Akyol et al., 2019). Hence, he located modernity within the cultural continuity and geographical specificity of Anatolia. In this sense, Anatolia constituted not merely the physical setting for his work, but also the cultural framework within which his architectural thinking was situated. Furthermore, rather than viewing Anatolia as a repository that reproduces vernacular forms, Bektaş regarded it as a vibrant cultural environment in which modern and contemporary architecture could be reinterpreted. Consequently, the importance he attributed to Anatolia was an effort to situate his contemporary architectural production within the historical, social, and geographical realities of its location, while embracing modern architecture.

For Bektaş, Mediterranean culture is not separate from Anatolian culture; in fact, when referring to the Mediterranean region, Anatolia is inherently implicated. Bektaş's association with the "Blue Anatolians" and their "Blue Voyages" further intertwines these geographical definitions. The Blue Anatolians claimed that Anatolia, particularly its western shores, has been the cradle of civilizations from prehistoric times to the present (Bilsel, 2007). The Blue Voyages were viewed as an extension of their narrative and they were organized with the aim of exploring Anatolian culture and traditions through ancient sites accessible from the western coast. For Bektaş, while his field of research encompasses the entire geography of Anatolia, exploring the Mediterranean coast as part of this geography has been significant. He has organized summer schools in Turkey's Aegean and Mediterranean regions. It is also possible to say that a significant number of his architectural works are located in the Mediterranean and Aegean region. Correspondingly, Abdi Güzer's (2023) poem on his observation and interpretation of Bektaş that Bektaş speaks three languages, namely the language of the Mediterranean, the language of Anatolia, and the language of Lorca, reveals the significance of the Mediterranean culture in Bektaş's architectural and literary production. Güzer also emphasized that Bektaş always prioritized his roots in the Mediterranean, expressing in his verses that Bektaş would pass through the Mediterranean before any other place. Consequently, this study claims that Bektaş's comprehensive practice reflects his Mediterranean identity, which is as strong as his Anatolian identity.

Bektaş, while developing his Anatolian discourse on architecture, also gives reference to the Mediterranean culture and geography. Moreover, Bektaş himself used the name of the specific place on which his buildings are located in order to describe them in addition to using "Anatolian" – such as Akdeniz'li (Mediterranean), Denizli'li (from Denizli), Antalya'lı (from Antalya). These descriptions evidently indicate that his modern architectural production is also Mediterranean. Unlike his two other buildings – the Kangotan House (Datça, 1977) and the Olbia Social Center (Antalya, 1999) – which he described as "Mediterranean", he did not describe Denizli Central Bank as such. While briefly describing the Denizli Central Bank, he specifically emphasized that it was a competition project and that its functional units were designed to work in harmony; still in some of his articles and interviews, that will be discussed later, he highlighted its Denizli'li (from Denizli) and Mediterranean features. Therefore, since the building reflects both Anatolian and Mediterranean architectural features, it will be read as a Mediterranean building in the scope of this article.

A MEDITERRANEAN MODERN ARTIFACT: DENİZLİ CENTRAL BANK

The Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey aimed to promote the development of urban spaces by spreading modern architectural production and culture in Anatolian cities through the design of its branch buildings via competitions and by renowned architects (Çalışkan & Aydın, 2024). The Central Bank's five branch buildings, designed through competitions between 1960 and 1980 – Bursa (1965–1967), Konya (1974), Denizli (1971–1973), Van (1973–1978), and İzmir (1981–1983) – have been included in DOCOMOMO's Modern Architectural Heritage. These buildings, falling under the rubric of "local expressions of modern architecture" (DOCOMOMO), are situated in city centers as representatives of local and modern aesthetics. The design of the lodgings in conjunction with the bank's functions has been regarded as a unique typology (Çalışkan & Aydın, 2024).

To briefly position the Denizli branch building among the others mentioned, its plan layout is similar to that of the Bursa and Konya branch buildings. In contrast, the Van and İzmir branch buildings were designed as compact structures rising on a square plan, with functions arranged around a central atrium (Çalışkan & Aydın, 2024). In the Bursa and Konya branch buildings, the residential units are located on the upper floors and are completely separated from the banks's service units. In contrast, at the Denizli Central Bank, the

service and residential units are connected via an open inner courtyard, and a visual separation is achieved through the opaque glass roof covering the bank's service units (Figure 1, 2). While the residential and service units in the Van and İzmir branches are connected internally with an inside atrium, the Denizli branch combines different functions within the building's overall integrity through the use of an open courtyard, while also ensuring that the units remain visually separated. The use of an open courtyard, which is a characteristic of Mediterranean architecture, has become a unique spatial solution that also defines the social space between the bank and the residential quarters.

The Denizli Central Bank is an important building in Bektaş's Anatolian-Mediterranean architectural practice, as it is the first Mediterranean architecture example he designed in this region. Bektaş's first building in Denizli was the Halil Bektaş Elementary School (1970), but the Central Bank was the first example in which he referenced aspects of the Mediterranean – specifically, the heat of Denizli and purple marble, a material unique to the region (Bektaş, 1976). Within the Mediterranean geography, The Babadağlılar Commercial Center (Denizli, 1973), which Bektaş described as one of Denizli's landmarks, the Kangotan House (Datça, 1977), which he defined as a “contemporary, Mediterranean, Anatolian building”, and Esat Sivri House (Denizli, 1975), which the heights of the spaces differs according to the functional requirements, were constructed later.

The Denizli branch building is significant as the first example of Bektaş developing his architectural discourse along the Anatolian-Mediterranean axis and reflecting this in his structures. The building is regarded as a unique structure because, although Bektaş did not elaborate much on it, it expresses itself as a piece of Anatolian-Mediterranean architecture. When the building was still very new, Bektaş wrote a brief article about it in the journal *Mimarlık*, mentioning the ventilation solution, the coolness maintained in the common areas, the use of materials specific to Denizli, the fact that the building did not have a “sour face,” the great joy of the people of Denizli because it had won first place in the competition, and the fact that users found the building functional (Bektaş, 1976) (Figure 3). Bektaş later described the Denizli Central Bank as a “personality” and emphasized the importance of this structure to him, noting that it was a process through which he came to understand that every architectural design is a question of personality (Bektaş, 1987). At a conference organized by the Chamber of Architects, he also briefly described the building as follows: “This was a competition. It is still in use today. It also meets today's needs.” (Bektaş, 2010: 29) The fact that his descriptions of the building are brief, clear, and focused on rational structural analysis demonstrates Bektaş's attitude, which Kuban defined as “seeking rationality rather than poetry.” Nevertheless, alongside this rationality, Bektaş points to the structure's Mediterranean character through his poetic narrative:

Denizli travertine rises from the ground and firmly envelops the ground floor.

On the floor, the Denizli purple leads the way for those arriving.

The floors above are made of natural stone and White. (Bektaş, 1976)

Denizli purple has been a particularly prominent feature of the building, as it is unique to this structure; in an interview, Bektaş noted that no one else used this purple marble (SALT, 2020: 29) (Figure 4). In the same interview, he also shared a previously unknown detail: he resolved the issue of the building's foundation by regulating and insulating the canal running beneath the site (SALT, 2020: 34-35). Understanding the characteristics of the earth on which the building will stand at the very beginning of the design process and devising a solution specific to it is one of the fundamental concerns of Mediterranean modernism.

Bank's service units are located at the ground level and the first level, and these two floors are connected with the two-storey high hall. Functionally bank requires universal spatial organization; in Denizli Central Bank spaces designed functionally according to the workflow, but more, characteristically the hall appears with an atmosphere specific to the local characteristics, through the use of traditional materials like wood, natural colors, and the use of Denizli travertine and marble.



Figure 1: Open courtyard of Denizli Central Bank and the semi-open social space.

Figure 2: The opaque glass roof above the service units and the ceiling lightings under the roof.

Source: Author's archive, 2021.



Figure 3: External façade of Denizli Central Bank.

Source: Author's archive, 2021.

From a functional standpoint, a bank requires a universal spatial layout; while the spaces at the Denizli Central Bank are designed in accordance with the workflow, the bank services hall also displays an atmosphere unique to the local character through the use of wood, natural colors, and local materials such as Denizli travertine and marble (Figure 4). By extending the two-story height of the hall to the entrance space on the exterior, Bektaş references the harmony between interior and exterior in modern architecture, while the bay windows on the side of the entrance express the locality within the modern context (Figure 3, 5). Bektaş expressed his use of bay windows not through symbolic, formal, or stylistic considerations, but as “a person raised within that culture” and responding the genuine issues without separating from the regional conditions. Therefore he stated that the effort to design in accordance with local conditions, while embracing the region's culture, resulted in the region's own architecture (Bektaş, 1987).

Other than the environmental realities, in Mediterranean architecture, open and semi-open spaces are commonly incorporated into the design concept because designs must account for climatic realities and – as Kütükçüoğlu emphasized, citing Aris Konstantinidis – intermediate spaces play a significant role in the Mediterranean living culture. These spatial features also reflect the Mediterranean identity through their direct connection with nature, the sun, and the wind (Kütükçüoğlu, 2022). The open courtyard is the most distinctive Mediterranean element in the Denizli Central Bank building. Bektaş's depiction of the direction of wind flow in the building's sectional drawing suggests that his Mediterranean way of thinking remains constantly active, even in his drawings as representational tools (Figure 6).

In the lodgments of Denizli Central Bank, Bektaş stated that he tried to create a warm atmosphere associated with Aegean streets and spaces; and also the houses can be ventilated effectively. He also emphasize that while Denizli travertines rise from the ground and firmly surround the ground level, upper floors are covered with white stone (Bektaş, 1976). Moreover, Bektaş designed a common area as an open space at the lower floor of the lodgments' houses (Figure 7). Evidently, Bektaş gave priority to the shared social space, which is culturally important for the Anatolian and Mediterranean people. In this shared social space, looking to the open courtyard, the organization of the seating furniture around a central decorative pond references to

traditional gathering spaces. The centrality enables a focus on shared activities within the traditional framework; Bektaş employs this structure often in social settings in his designs.

The open courtyard is designed together with the semi-open social space, which is at the same level with the courtyard (Figure 1, 5). Bektaş conceived the design created by these two spaces, taking into account both the need for ventilation in a heated climate and traditional courtyard culture in Western Anatolia and the Mediterranean region (Bektaş, 1987). It could be argued that this design concept also makes reference to the use of flat terraces, a characteristic feature of Mediterranean modern architecture. The structure, which culminates in a flat roof at its highest level, gradually descends from this top floor to the residential floors and then to the courtyard and social space level, creating a sense of continuity between the different levels through a series of terraces.

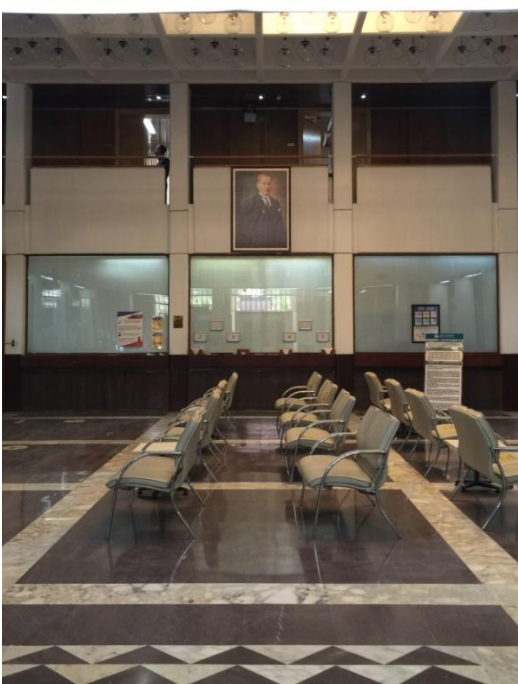


Figure 4: The bank services hall and Denizli purple at the ground floor.



Figure 5: Entrance to the Denizli Central Bank and the semi-open social space level above the entrance.

Source: Author's archive, 2021.

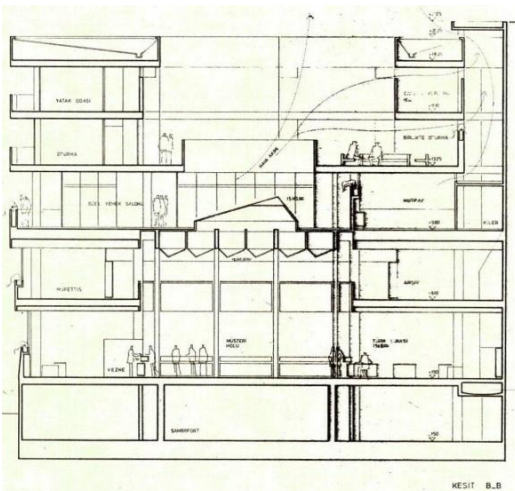


Figure 6: Denizli Central Bank section drawing.

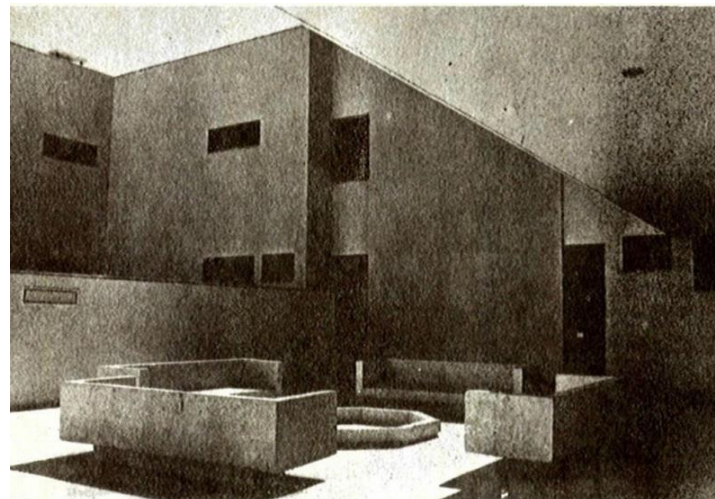


Figure 7: Open common area designed at the lower floor of the lodgments' houses.

Source: Bektaş, C. (1976), photograph by Selmin Başak.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to interpret the Denizli Central Bank as a modern Mediterranean building designed by Cengiz Bektaş. Architecture constitutes a part of Bektaş's extensive cultural production. Since Bektaş chose to pursue his identities as a poet and writer alongside his identity as an architect, he uses a literary narrative style when describing his buildings in his texts or interviews. Cultural identity, and specifically geographical identity in architecture, is significant to Bektaş; thereby, he maintained his aim of understanding Anatolia and

connecting with its traditions through architecture at the very center of his work. Geographically, he has studied the anonymous architectural art of ancient settlements along the Mediterranean coast and Anatolian villages; through the architectural works of this region, he has sought to highlight Anatolian and Mediterranean cultures and ensure cultural continuity.

Considering Bektaş's architectural approach, it is evident that he embraced modern architecture. After completing his architectural education in Munich, Germany, and returning to Turkey, he studied examples of Anatolian folk architecture and observed that modern elements were inherently present in these works. As a result of all these observations and his accumulated knowledge, he developed an architectural discourse that embraced modernism but believed that local cultural and geographical elements should define architecture, and he designed his buildings accordingly.

When Bektaş is considered within the architectural context of the 1960s, when he began practicing architecture, it became apparent that his work aligned with the late-modernist debates that criticized formal and stylistic concerns of early modern architecture. Among critical modern discourses, Mediterranean modernism, much like regionalism and situated modernism has emphasized fundamental elements such as culture, climate, place, and geography. In Turkey, Bektaş was among the architects who opposed the International Style's detachment from context and embraced a local and modern approach to architecture.

The significance of Anatolia is prevalent in Bektaş's architectural thinking. Given that Bektaş developed his Anatolian architectural perspective through study trips along the Mediterranean coast, it can also be said that he developed a Mediterranean architectural conception. The Mediterranean region, where he was born, conducted his study trips as an architect and where his architectural practice was most active, naturally led Bektaş to produce a form of modern Mediterranean architecture.

The Denizli Central Bank, therefore, emerged as a building with a Mediterranean character, shaped by Bektaş's architectural vision. In his architectural program, Bektaş prioritizes the organization of functional spaces and designing in accordance with the demands of the climate and culture; he also emphasizes local identity in his use of materials. Built in this way, the building naturally reveals its Mediterranean character. Bearing in mind that the aim of Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey to foster a cultural and architectural value, and to enrich the urban character of the cities through the distinctive architecture of its branches, examining the Denizli Central Bank building was considered important in this study. Architecture, as Bektaş regarded it to be, is a cultural production; hence in the context of Turkey, creating authentic architecture that reflects the identity of its location and embodies the cultural heritage of that place – spanning from the ancient past to the present – is important for strengthening and sustaining cultural awareness. Viewed from this perspective, it is evident that Bektaş's detailed elaboration of design practices necessitated by cultural and geographical-climatic factors in the Denizli Central Bank adds value to the architecture of both the Mediterranean region and Turkey. The reading of the Mediterranean culture's place in the architecture as a tool for urban cultural identity in this study is considered a reminder that creation of architectural works is not a process independent of cultural heritage and contemporary concerns.

Consequently, the contribution of this study is to highlight the worth of evaluating various aspects of contemporary architectural production in an integrated manner, with the aim of establishing a foundation for rethinking the role of architecture in human life from a more holistic perspective. Culture, geography and climate are not solely physical aspects in architectural production; connected to one another, they ensure that architecture accomplishes its representational and functional roles. The Denizli Central Bank has been interpreted not only as a functional bank structure but also as an example of how Mediterranean culture and climate are embodied in a building. It stands as an example of how architecture can achieve a timeless expression when it is in harmony with the culture of life and the geographical and climatic conditions in which that life persists. In this regard, it continues to stand as a contemporary and enduring structure.

REFERENCES

- Akyol, M.; Boyacıoğlu, E. & Altan, T. E. (2019). "Mimarlık ve Yolculuk Pratiği: Cengiz Bektaş'ın "Anadolululuk" Söylemi", *Mimarlık*, 407: 46-50.
- Akyol, M. (2019). "Cengiz Bektaş'ın Anadolu Mimarlık Söylemini Yolculuk ve Yerel Modernlik Üzerinden Okumak", unpublished PhD Thesis, Gazi University Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences, Ankara.
- Altınışık, I. U. (2022). "Cengiz Bektaş'ın Ozan-Mimar Olarak Persona İnşası". *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture*, 39(2): 137-158. <https://doi.org/10.4305/METU.JFA.2022.2.7>

- Avşar, Ö. B. & Fidangenç, A. Ş. (2013). “Denizli Merkez Bankası Binası, Türkiye Mimarlığında Modernizmin Yerel Açılımları IX”, Docomomo Türkiye presentations, December 6-8, 2013, Akdeniz Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi Mimarlık Bölümü, 135, Antalya.
- Aycı, H. & Boyacıoğlu, E. (2012). “A Reading in Critical Regionalism: Analysis of Two Houses By Han Tümerterkin”, *Open House International*, 37: 93-104.
- Bektaş, C. (2018). *Türk Evi*, YEM, İstanbul.
- Bektaş, C. (2017). “Yüksek Mimar Cengiz Bektaş ile Mavi Anadoluculuk Röportajı”, Burak Baş (interviewer), *Arkeofili*, URL: <http://arkeofili.com/yukse-mimar-cengiz-bektas-ile-mavi-anadoluculuk-roportaji/>, Last Accessed: 09.07.2026.
- Bektaş, C. (2010). *Cumartesi Buluşmaları: Mimarlar Deneyimlerini Paylaşıyor: Cengiz Bektaş*, TMMOB Mimarlar Odası İstanbul Büyükkent Şubesi, İstanbul.
- Bektaş, C. (2004). *Halk Yapı Sanatından Bir Örnek: Antalya, Bileşim*, İstanbul.
- Bektaş, C. (1995). *Benim Oğlum Bina Okur*, Tasarım Yayın Grubu, İstanbul.
- Bektaş, C. (1987). “Bir Mimar”, *Mimarlık*, 226: 81-94.
- Bektaş, C. (1976). “Denizli’de Son On Yılda Gerçeklesen Yapılardan Beşinin Öyküsü”, *Mimarlık*, 148 (76/3): 115-128.
- Bilsel, S. M. C. (2007). ““Our Anatolia’: Organicism and the Making of Humanist Culture in Turkey.” *Muqarnas*, 24: 223-241.
- Boyut (2001). *Cengiz Bektaş, Çağdaş Türkiye Mimarları Dizisi 4*, Boyut, İstanbul.
- Bozdoğan, S. (2009). “Unutulmuş Bir Başka Sedat Eldem Çizgisi: Makine Çağına karşı Lirik bir Anadolu/Akdeniz Modernizmi” (Ed. B. Tanju & U. Tanyeli), *Sedat Hakkı Eldem II: Retrospektif*, pp. 14-23, Osmanlı Bankası Arşiv ve Araştırma Merkezi, İstanbul.
- Bozdoğan, S. & Akcan, E. (2012). *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History*, Reaktion Books, London.
- Ciravoglu, Ö. (2023). “Bütünsel Bir İnsan” (Ed. H. Bülend Tuna), *Mimarlar Odası Tarihinden Portreler*, pp. 27-30, TMMOB Mimarlar Odası İstanbul Büyükkent Şubesi Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Çalışkan, A. E. & Aydın, D. (2024). “Modern Mimarlık Kapsamında Tipolojik Analiz: Yarışma ile Elde Edilmiş TC Merkez Bankası Şube Binaları”, *Premium e-Journal of Social Sciences (PEJOSS)*, 8(49): 1656-1667. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14580342>
- DOCOMOMO, URL: <https://www.docomomo-tr.org/>
- Frampton, K. (2007). “The International Style: Theme and Variations 1925-65”, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, Thames & Hudson, London, pp. 248-261.
- Frampton, K. (1983). “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance” (Ed. Hal Foster), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, pp. 16-30, Bay Press, Port Townsend, Washington.
- Goldhagen, S. W. (2000). “Coda: Reconceptualizing the Modern” (Ed. Sarah Williams Goldhagen & Rejean Legault), *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture*, pp. 301-323, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Gürel, M. Ö. (2016). *Mid-Century Modernism in Turkey: Architecture Across Cultures in the 1950s and 1960s*, Routledge, New York & London.
- Güzer, A. (2023). “Dört Kişiydiler, Bir de O” (Ed. H. Bülend Tuna), *Mimarlar Odası Tarihinden Portreler*, pp. 78-82, TMMOB Mimarlar Odası İstanbul Büyükkent Şubesi Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Keleş, R. (2023). “Cengiz Bektaş Sanat ve Kültür Yaşamımızda Çok Yönlü Bir Dost” (Ed. H. Bülend Tuna), *Mimarlar Odası Tarihinden Portreler*, pp. 21-26, TMMOB Mimarlar Odası İstanbul Büyükkent Şubesi Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Kütükçüoğlu, B. (2022). “Güncel Türkiye Mimarlığında Akdenizli Modernliğe Analitik Bir Bakış: Güncel Türkiye Mimarlığında Akdenizli Modernlik”, *Tasarım Kuram*, 18(36): 95-112. <https://doi.org/10.14744/tasarimkuram.2022.85530>

- Mallgrave, H. F. (2005). "The International Style Exhibition", *Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey: 1673-1968*, pp. 298-304, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & New York.
- Mumford, L. (2007). "Exerpts from The South in Architecture" (Ed. Vincent B. Canizaro), *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition*, pp. 96-101, Princeton Architectural Press, New York.
- Ockman, J. (1993). "Introduction" (Ed. Joan Ockman & Edward Eigen), *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, pp. 13-24, Columbia Books of Architecture & Rizzoli, New York.
- Örmecioğlu, H. T. & Akan, A. E. (2022). "Cengiz Bektaş'ın Anlatıcı Mimarlığına Bir Örnek: Olbia Sosyal Özeği", *GRID-Architecture Planning and Design Journal*, 5(1): 1-21.
- SALT (2020). "Cengiz Bektaş İle Mimari Üretimleri Üzerine Söyleşi", Tuğçe Kaplan (Research and interview), *Garanti Kültür, İstanbul*. URL: <https://saltonline.org/tr/2252/cengiz-bektas-ile-mimari-uretimleri-uzerine-soylesi>, Last Accessed: 07.07.2026.
- Sönmez, F. (2021). "Anadolu'da Bir Mimari Proje Yarışması: Vedat Dalokay ve Türkiye Cumhuriyet Merkez Bankası Kayseri Şubesi, 1964-1968", *Online Journal of Art and Design*, 9(2): 38-55.
- Yücel, A. (2005). "Pluralism Takes Command: The Turkish Architectural Scene Today" (Ed. Renata Holod; Ahmet Evin & Süha Özkan), *Modern Turkish Architecture*, pp. 124-156, Chamber of Architects of Turkey, Ankara.
- García Vergara, M. & Pizza, A. (2021). "The Mediterranean and Modern Architecture: The Dissemination of a Myth in Architectural Media", *The Journal of Architecture*, 26(8): 1117–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2021.1980419>