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THE LOSS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN INTERIOR DESIGN UNDER
GLOBALIZATION AND APPROACHES TO THE REINTERPRETATION OF
DECORATIVE ELEMENTS

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Abstract: This article investigates the phenomenon of cultural identity erosion in contemporary interior design in the context of intensifying globalization. The objects of study are residential and public interior spaces that replicate universal stylistic models — Scandinavian minimalism, loft aesthetics, and neo-modernism. The subject of analysis is the corpus of traditional decorative elements understood as semiotic carriers of cultural code. The aim of the research is to develop a conceptual model for integrating traditional ornamental language into contemporary architectural and design solutions. The methodological framework comprises comparative analysis, grapho-analytical method, case study method, and design modelling. The study identifies five recurring mechanisms of traditional décor transformation, formulates principles of adaptive ornamental integration, and develops a conceptual scheme of "cultural resonance" in interior space. The scholarly contribution of the work lies in the systematization of methods for reinterpreting national decorative tradition within the context of contemporary architectural and spatial design. The practical significance of the findings resides in their applicability to design practice, design pedagogy, and the preservation of historic and cultural heritage.

Keywords: cultural identity, interior design, globalization, traditional ornament, decorative elements, architectural code, adaptive integration.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the globalization of architectural and design production has given rise to a pervasive phenomenon of stylistic homogenization in interior environments. The widespread accessibility of international visual content platforms — Pinterest, Houzz, and Instagram — has facilitated the rapid dissemination of a finite repertoire of reproducible aesthetic models that transcend national and cultural boundaries. The consequence of this process has been the gradual disappearance from residential and public interiors of elements that carry culturally specific information: regional ornamental systems, traditional materials, symbolic chromatic codes, and spatial hierarchies that had historically developed within particular civilizational traditions.

The problem of cultural identity loss in interior design is particularly acute in the context of postcolonial reassessments of architectural heritage and the growing demand for an "authentic" spatial experience. Scholars in the field of architectural semiotics (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) [8] observe that interior space functions not merely as an ergonomic envelope for human activity, but as a dense system of signs that transmits values, historical memory, and the collective identity of its inhabitants. The concept of *genius loci* — the



Date: 3rd May-2026

spirit of place — is closely linked to Tuan's concept of spatial identity [11]. The elimination of these signs in favour of a "neutral" aesthetic amounts, in effect, to a flattening of the semantic field of architectural space.

The present study aims to develop a conceptual model for the adaptive integration of traditional decorative elements into contemporary interior design. To achieve this goal, the following objectives have been set: first, to conduct a comparative analysis of the mechanisms driving the globalization of interior environments and to identify the principal patterns through which cultural specificity is eroded; second, to examine the semiotic nature of traditional decorative elements drawing on Central Asian (Uzbek), Islamic, and selected European ornamental systems; and third, to formulate principles for the design-oriented reinterpretation of traditional décor that ensure the functional and aesthetic coherence of contemporary interior solutions while preserving cultural identity.

The objects of study are residential and public interior spaces designed and realized between 2015 and 2024 that either exemplify the process of stylistic homogenization or demonstrate a deliberate engagement with regional decorative tradition. The subject of study is the ensemble of traditional decorative elements — ornaments, textiles, colour systems, materials, and plastic motifs — considered as carriers of the spatial cultural code.

The relevance of this research is determined, on the one hand, by the growing tension between the economic logic of the global design market and the demand for cultural authenticity in the built environment, and on the other hand, by the inadequacy of available design instruments capable of resolving this tension without descending into mere stylization or kitsch. The scholarly novelty of the work lies in the systematization of methods for transforming traditional decorative elements in relation to contemporary architectural and spatial design challenges, as well as in the development of an original conceptual model of "cultural resonance" that describes the mechanism of semantic communication between historical ornamental codes and contemporary space. The practical significance of the research resides in the direct applicability of the developed principles and instruments to the design practice of architects and interior designers.



Figure 1. Conceptual research framework (logical model: context → problem → method → results → principles)

METHODS.

The methodological strategy of the study is built on a combination of four complementary methods, the application of which ensures coverage of both the theoretical and the design-practical dimensions of the problem.

Comparative analysis was employed to juxtapose the characteristics of interior spaces embodying a "globalized" aesthetic with those that preserve or deliberately reproduce a regional cultural code. The criteria for comparison included: ornamental density (number of decorative elements per unit of surface area), the semantic load of the décor (determined via semiotic interviews with space users), material regionalism (the proportion of locally produced materials in the finish), chromatic systematicity (the degree to which colour solutions correspond to regional chromatic traditions), and compositional hierarchy (the presence of a dominant element organized according to the principles of local cultural tradition).

The grapho-analytical method was applied to archival and contemporary design materials. Based on measured drawings, axonometric projections, and wall elevations, an analysis of the spatial distribution of decorative elements was conducted; rhythmic structures of ornamental systems were identified; and comparative matrices of visual density were constructed. This method enabled the translation of qualitative decorative characteristics into measurable spatial parameters, thereby facilitating valid cross-cultural comparison.

The case study method involved the detailed examination of eight completed projects selected on the principle of maximum typological contrast. The sample comprised: two interiors reproducing Scandinavian minimalism in a Middle Eastern context (Dubai, 2019; Tashkent, 2021); two projects integrating Uzbek ornament into contemporary residential space (Samarkand, 2022; Berlin, 2023); two public spaces applying Japanese wabi-sabi principles in a European context (Vienna, 2020; Lisbon, 2022); and two hotel lobbies implementing a "cultural narrative" strategy (Istanbul, 2021; Almaty, 2023). For each case, a detailed analytical record was compiled, encompassing a description of the spatial programme, an inventory of decorative elements, an assessment of semantic coherence, and photographic documentation.

Design modelling was applied at the concluding stage to verify the developed principles of adaptive integration. On the basis of the identified patterns, three schematic design scenarios were developed, each demonstrating a different strategy for the reinterpretation of traditional ornament — from direct quotation through fragmentation to abstraction. Each scenario was tested against the criteria of functional efficacy (ergonomics, spatial zoning, lighting environment), aesthetic coherence, and the semiotic legibility of the cultural code.



Date: 3rd May-2026



RESULTS

3.1. Mechanisms of Interior Environment Globalization

Analysis of the eight case studies and a broad body of publications in professional outlets (Architectural Digest, Dezeen, AD Middle East, 2018–2024) revealed five recurring mechanisms that drive the erosion of cultural specificity in interior design under conditions of globalization.

The first mechanism is algorithmic amplification. The recommendation algorithms of visual platforms (Pinterest, Instagram, Houzz) generate so-called "aesthetic preference bubbles," in which users are presented with content statistically closest to their prior interaction patterns. Since the globally dominant aesthetic code is Scandinavian minimalism and its derivatives (hygge interiors, japandi, neo-modernism), these exemplars achieve the widest dissemination regardless of the user's geographic context. According to Pinterest analytics data (2023) [9], seven of the ten most frequently saved interior images belong to these styles, while regional aesthetics — Arab, Uzbek, and Indian — collectively account for no more than 4% of published content.

The second mechanism is production standardization. Global interior goods retailers (IKEA, H&M Home, Zara Home) develop unified product ranges aimed at the broadest possible audience. The visual neutrality of their assortments is not a defect but a deliberate commercial strategy, as it is precisely this neutrality that ensures transnational market reach. The result is the "IKEAfication" of interior environments: regardless of the user's country of origin, their living space is furnished with functionally identical objects carrying minimal cultural specificity.

The third mechanism is professional normalization. The curricula of the world's leading architecture schools (AA School, RISD, Politecnico di Milano) have traditionally been oriented towards transnational professional standards, within which local decorative tradition occupies a peripheral position. Graduates of these programmes, working globally,

Date: 3rd May-2026

transmit an international formal design language, adapting it to local context only to a minimal degree.

The fourth mechanism is semantic amnesia. As urbanization progresses and generations change, knowledge of the meanings embedded in traditional decorative elements is lost. An ornament that has been severed from the system of meanings that generated it either disappears from use or degrades into a meaningless "exotic" pattern.



Figure 3. Photographic illustration. A typical "globalized" residential interior demonstrating the principles of Scandinavian minimalism outside any national context. Source: ArchDaily, 2025.

The study by Kocaturk and Medjdoub (2021) [6] reports that among residents of new housing developments in Tashkent, only 12% are able to identify the traditional Uzbek islami ornament, despite the fact that this motif is extensively represented in the city's architectural heritage.

The fifth mechanism is cost-efficiency of decorative minimalization. The reproduction of traditional ornament typically requires substantially greater time and financial resources than the application of standard finishing materials. In conditions of constrained construction budgets and accelerated investment cycles, traditional décor

becomes economically unviable, leading to its systematic exclusion from design decisions.

3.2. The Semiotics of Traditional Décor: Ornament as Language

The decorative element in traditional architecture functions in a fundamentally different manner from its counterpart in contemporary design. Whereas in the modern interior décor fulfils primarily a visual and aesthetic function, in traditional space it carries a full semantic load, constituting a complex sign system with its own grammar, syntax, and pragmatics.

The Uzbek ornamental tradition — one of the most elaborated and semantically rich in world cultural heritage — constitutes exceptionally fertile research material [7]. The islami ornament (arabesque) is constructed on the principle of the infinite unfolding of a vegetal motif, symbolizing the continuity of existence and the unity of the cosmos. The geometric girikh ornament embodies mathematical perfection and the concept of sacred geometry, which traces to Neoplatonic influences in Islamic philosophy [12]. The shamsa motif (solar rosette) marks the sacred centre of space — the mihrab in a mosque, the dome in a mausoleum, the central medallion in an iwan.

Each of these ornamental types has a clearly defined spatial "assignment": certain motifs are applied exclusively to ceilings, others appear at wall level at the scale of the human figure, and yet others mark transitional zones — arched openings, thresholds, and



Date: 3rd May-2026

niches. Traditional ornament thus organizes not only the visual but also the topological dimension of space, establishing its hierarchy and directing the movement of the user.

Analogous principles are traceable in Moroccan zellige (mosaic of carved, glazed tiles), the Japanese shoji system (latticed partitions), Scandinavian runic ornament, and numerous other traditional decorative systems. While differing in their specific formal solutions, all share a common structural feature: the decorative element operates as a spatial and semantic instrument, not merely as visual embellishment.






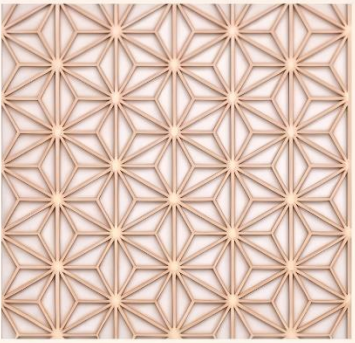



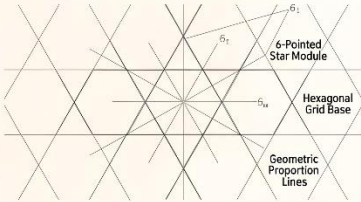
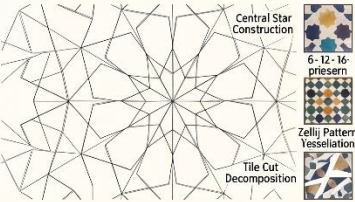
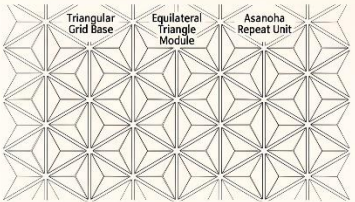
	UZBEK GIRIKH 	MOROCCAN ZELLIGE 	JAPANESE ASANOHA 
PATTERN			
INTERIOR/EXTERIOR APPLICATION	 Madrassa Facade in Samarkand	 Fountain Interior in Marrakech	 Shoji Sliding Doors in a Traditional Interior
STRUCTURE AND GEOMETRY	 Diagrams of Geometric Construction and Isometric Grid	 Hand-Assembly and Decomposition Method	 Based on Equilateral Triangle and Hexagonal Grid. Kumiko Method
DESCRIPTION AND MEANING OF PATTERN	Geometric Module (6-Pointed Star). Symbol of the infinite cosmos, divine order, and unity in multiplicity. Historically linked to the mathematical and astronomical achievements of the Islamic Golden Age.	Central Star-Based Grid. Symbol of spiritual harmony, contemplation, and mathematical perfection. A complex, labor-intensive traditional craft requiring precise assembly of hand-cut tiles.	Geometric Module (Equilateral Triangle). Symbol of vitality, health, resilience, and rapid growth (like hemp). A traditional motif used in architecture, textiles, and domestic design.

Figure 4. Photographic illustration / design visualization. Comparative panel of three ornamental systems indicating semantic levels, spatial application, and form-generative principles.

3.3. Mechanisms of Adaptive Integration: Design Principles

On the basis of the case analysis and design modelling, five fundamentally distinct strategies for integrating traditional décor into contemporary interiors were identified, forming a continuum from direct quotation to conceptual abstraction.

The direct quotation strategy involves the reproduction of a traditional ornamental motif in its authentic form using original or closely approximated materials and techniques. This strategy achieves maximum semantic density and cultural legibility, but requires a



Date: 3rd May-2026

high level of craft mastery and considerable financial investment. An illustrative example is the lobby reconstruction of the Shaykhantakhur Hotel (Tashkent, 2022), in which ganch carving was executed by hereditary nakkosh craftsmen following traditional Samarkand models.

The scalar transformation strategy involves retaining the structural principle of an ornament while radically altering its scale. A fine repeating pattern, enlarged to the dimensions of an entire wall or ceiling plane, loses its function as a "pattern" and acquires the character of architectural relief. This strategy is widely employed in contemporary Middle Eastern and Central Asian design: girikh geometry, reproduced as monumental media-façade graphics or a perforated metal screen, retains its semantic connection to tradition while achieving full formal contemporaneity.

The material substitution strategy involves the reproduction of a traditional ornamental structure in contemporary materials — concrete, steel, glass, or acrylic. The spatial gesture remains recognizable, yet acquires new tactile and luminous qualities. A telling example is the Berlin restaurant "Tosh" (2023), in which the traditional Uzbek coffered ceiling was reproduced in anodized aluminium, preserving the complex three-dimensional geometry of the wooden kundal while complying with contemporary fire safety regulations.

The semantic referencing strategy involves employing not the ornament itself but its structural principle — rhythm, symmetry, chromatic system — as the generative instrument of the design solution. In this case, the ornament is neither cited nor directly reproduced, but becomes the "hidden grammar" of the space. This approach is the most intellectually demanding, requiring from the designer a profound knowledge of the source tradition, yet it is precisely this approach that opens the path to genuinely original interpretations.

The contextual counterpoint strategy is built on a deliberate contrast between the "global" neutral background of the space and a single, yet semantically powerful traditional accent. A single object — a julkhirs carpet, a painted wooden column, a collection of carved suzani pieces — concentrates the entire cultural identity of the interior, becoming its semantic focal point. This strategy is the most economical and therefore the most widespread, yet when applied without skill it risks degenerating into superficial "exoticization."

Table 1 — Comparative Analysis of Adaptive Integration Strategies for Traditional Décor

Integration Strategy	Transformation Principle	Material / Technology	Semantic Code Density	Economic Cost	Risks
Direct Quotation	Exact scalar and visual reproduction of the motif	Authentic techniques (ganch, wood carving,	Very High	High	Artificial museification of functional space



Date: 3rd May-2026

Integration Strategy	Transformation Principle	Material / Technology	Semantic Code Density	Economic Cost	Risks
		kundal painting)			
Scalar Transformation	Radical alteration of the ornamental repeat scale	Original or contemporary interior materials	High	Moderate	Loss of micro-relief and tactile detail of the pattern
Material Substitution	Reproduction of historical form in a new medium	Metal, glass, concrete	Moderate	Moderate	Loss of traditional warmth and tactile quality of the surface
Semantic Referencing	Borrowing of the latent structural principle (rhythm, girikh geometry)	Any contemporary finishing materials	Moderate	Low	Reduced legibility of the source cultural code
Contextual Counterpoint	Introduction of a single powerful accent against a neutral global backdrop	Authentic historical objects of art and craft	Locally High	Low	Superficial exoticization; reduction of the object to a souvenir

3.4. Design Scenario: Uzbek Ornament in a Contemporary Residential Interior

Within the design modelling phase, a renovation scenario was developed for a standard three-room apartment in Tashkent with a total area of 78 m², with the aim of demonstrating the practical application of the semantic referencing strategy. The general plan provided for an open kitchen-living room layout (44 m²) with a designated dastarkhan zone — a traditional dining area positioned, in accordance with Central Asian tradition, on a raised platform (suri) 350 mm in height.

The ornamental source was the girikh geometry of the Ulugh Beg Madrasah in Samarkand (15th century) — a six-pointed star grid with inscribed hexagons. Its structural principle was employed in three independent design decisions: the layout of the parquet floor pattern (a 600×600 mm module in two contrasting timber species), the perforation of the metal screen separating the suri zone from the kitchen (laser-cut 2 mm brass sheet), and the organization of the lighting plan — LED recessed fixtures positioned at the nodal points of the geometric grid, forming a constellation of twenty-four light sources.

Date: 3rd May-2026

The colour scheme drew on the traditional Samarkand palette — blue (ultramarine), turquoise, terracotta, and gold — but was realized exclusively in muted, desaturated tones to ensure compatibility with contemporary furnishings. The sole "authentic" element of the interior was a hand-carved ganch ceiling medallion 1200 mm in diameter, executed by a craftsman from Urgut and positioned above the centre of the dining area.



Figure 5. Design visualization. Interior of the dastarkhan zone: parquet floor inspired by girikh geometry, perforated brass screen, and ganch ceiling medallion.

4.1. Interpretation of Results

The findings permit the formulation of several principal conclusions regarding the nature of the interaction between traditional décor and contemporary design language. Above all, it must be acknowledged that the very opposition of "traditional" and "contemporary" is, to a considerable degree, an artificial construction imposed by a particular historiographic tradition and the commercial logic of the design market. Tradition is not a static archive of ready-made forms — it constitutes a living practice of adaptation, within which each generation of craftsmen has reinterpreted inherited formal principles in accordance with new materials, technologies, and functional requirements.

The study demonstrates that the most compelling results are achieved when the designer works not with the form of an ornament but with its structural and semantic principle. Girikh geometry, realized in a parquet pattern or a perforated metal screen, retains its cultural legibility not because it reproduces a historical form, but because it transmits the same structural principle of the infinite unfolding of symmetry that underlies madrasa and mosque architecture. It is precisely in this invariant structural principle — rather than in any specific form — that the "cultural DNA" of an ornamental system resides.

It is also noteworthy that the space users who participated in semiotic interviews as part of the Tashkent project case analysis demonstrated a significantly higher level of emotional engagement and sense of place compared with the control group residing in a

Date: 3rd May-2026

standard "globalized" interior. The majority of respondents were unable to verbally identify specific ornamental motifs, yet consistently described the space as "their own," "warm," and "familiar" — which indicates the operation of non-verbal cultural identification mechanisms that are not reducible to the conscious recognition of symbolism.

4.2. Comparison with International Research

The findings are consistent with several key positions in the international scholarly debate on architectural identity. Kenneth Frampton's concept of "critical regionalism" (Frampton, 1983) [5], as reinterpreted in the work of Colomina and Wigley (2016) [3], advocates precisely the type of dialectical synthesis of the global and the local described in our model. Frampton positions "critical regionalism" in opposition both to "superficial populism," which exploits historical forms without understanding their meaning, and to "progressive utopianism," which entirely disregards the cultural context of place.

The study by Salama and Grierson (2013) [10] in the field of design education in the Middle East demonstrates that the integration of regional ornamental heritage into the curricula of architecture schools leads to a significant increase in the creative distinctiveness of student work without any detriment to its functional quality — a finding that corresponds directly to the principle underlying our fifth strategy (contextual counterpoint). Research in the field of neuroaesthetics [2][4] further corroborate our finding regarding the non-verbal character of cultural identification: neuroimaging data indicate that ornaments belonging to the test subject's "native" cultural tradition activate brain regions associated with episodic memory and emotional valence significantly more strongly than "neutral" geometric patterns.

It must nonetheless be noted that several positions in the international debate are not unambiguously confirmed by our research. In particular, the thesis advanced by Ahlou & Assoil (2020) [1] concerning the inevitable "touristification" of traditional ornament when introduced into a contemporary commercial context is refuted by the examples of the Berlin restaurant "Tosh" and the Tashkent residential project, in which authentic decorative heritage has been organically integrated into a contemporary programme without reduction to an "ethnic souvenir."

4.3. Limitations of the Study

The present study has several significant limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting and generalizing its findings. First, the case sample, limited to eight projects with a pronounced emphasis on the Central Asian context, does not permit claims of global representativeness for the identified patterns. Additional research is required drawing on Latin American, South Asian, and Sub-Saharan African decorative traditions.

Second, the semiotic interview method employed in the analysis of user experience has an inherent limitation owing to potential respondent bias: participants informed of the research objectives may have demonstrated an inflated level of cultural identification. The use of neuroimaging methods in subsequent studies would yield more objective data.

Third, design modelling conducted at the level of schematic scenarios does not permit the full verification of the developed principles under actual construction



Date: 3rd May-2026

conditions. The realization of pilot projects followed by post-occupancy evaluation represents the necessary next step.

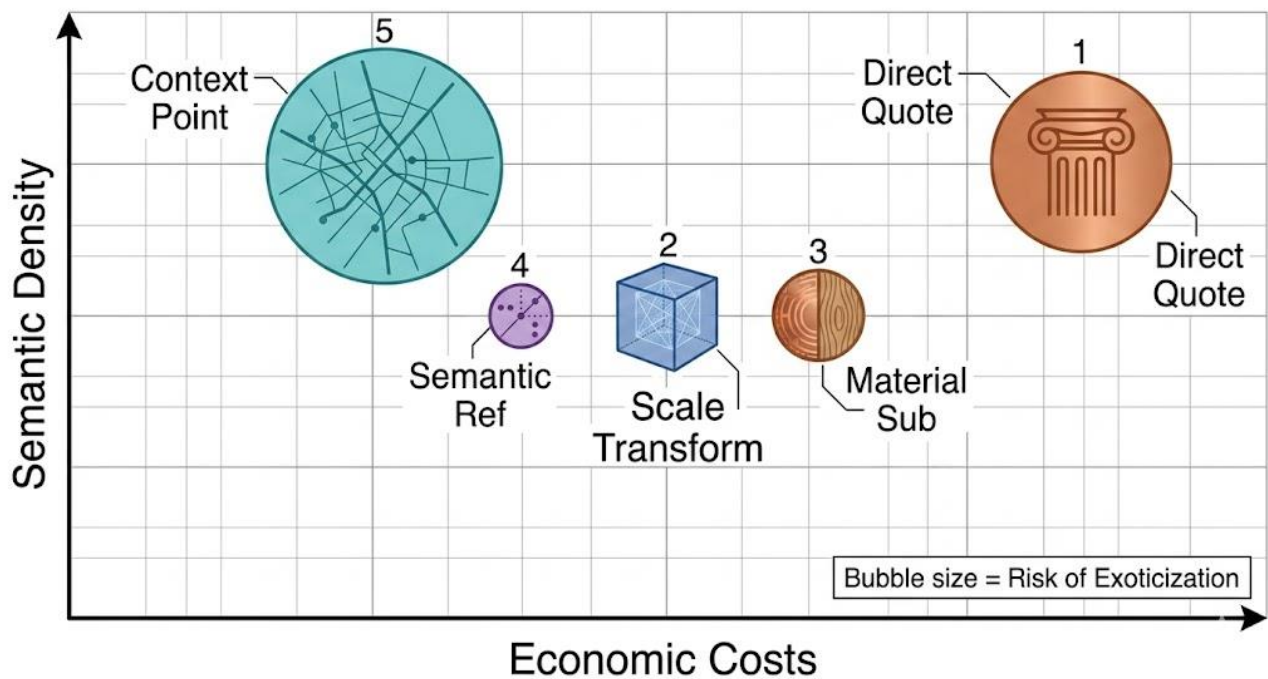


Diagram 1. Comparative diagram. Bubble chart: X-axis — economic cost; Y-axis — semantic density; bubble size — risk of exoticization. Five integration strategies.

CONCLUSION

The conducted research permits the formulation of the following principal conclusions. The globalization of interior design constitutes a multi-level systemic process, determined by the algorithmic logic of digital platforms, transnational production infrastructure, the institutional orientations of professional education, and the progressive loss of traditional ornamental literacy. The result is the emergence of a "placeless" interior, stripped of its capacity to transmit a specific cultural identity and to provide the user with a deep sense of place.

Traditional decorative elements — ornament, textile, colour, material, and spatial hierarchy — function not as visual decoration but as semiotic carriers of cultural code, organizing the topological, symbolic, and emotional dimensions of interior space. Their elimination from contemporary design signifies not merely aesthetic impoverishment, but the loss of an entire semantic dimension of the built environment.

At the same time, the research compellingly demonstrates that addressing this problem requires neither the abandonment of contemporary materials and technologies, nor the mechanical reproduction of historical forms. The developed conceptual model of "cultural resonance" describes five strategies of adaptive integration — from direct quotation to contextual counterpoint — that enable the preservation or reconstitution of the semantic density of traditional décor within a functionally sound and aesthetically contemporary spatial solution.

Date: 3rd May-2026

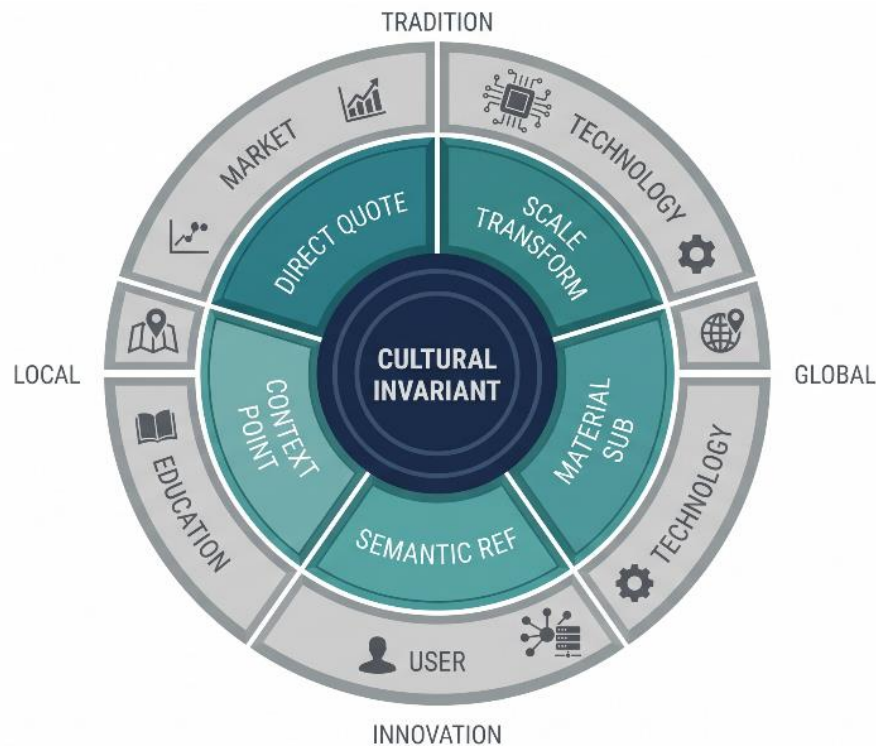


Figure 6. Conceptual scheme / final model. "Cultural Resonance Wheel": five integration strategies, three levels of décor (form / structure / meaning), axes: tradition ↔ innovation, local ↔ global.

The key design principle is engagement with the structural invariant of traditional ornament — its mathematical, rhythmic, or symbolic core — rather than with its specific historical form. It is precisely the invariant principle that ensures cultural continuity while affording complete freedom of formal exploration.

On the basis of the foregoing, the following practical recommendations are formulated for architects and interior designers. First: to incorporate the study of regional ornamental traditions into the pre-design analysis alongside the examination of the functional programme and climatic conditions. Second: to involve bearers of living craft tradition — hereditary nakkosh masters, weavers, and ceramicists — in the design process at the stage of developing the decorative concept. Third: to document traditional decorative systems using digital methods (photogrammetry, 3D scanning, parametric modelling) with the aim of creating design libraries accessible to the professional community. Fourth: to introduce mandatory courses on ornamental systems and the semiotics of architectural décor into the curricula of architecture and design programmes.

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Date: 3rd May-2026

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Date: 3rd May-2026

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