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Evaluation of the Concept of Cultural Sustainability in Housing Projects: The Aga Khan Architecture Awards (1978–2025)

Ezgi Şahin[1*], Hilal Aycı[2], Aslı Taş[3]

[1] Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences, Faculty of Technology, Gazi University, 06500 Yenimahalle, Ankara, Türkiye
[2] Department of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Gazi University, 06570 Maltepe, Ankara, Türkiye
[3] Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, 50300 Nevşehir, Türkiye
[*] Corresponding author, e-mail: 24831101025@gazi.edu.tr

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Abstract

Culture is a concept that encompasses the material and spiritual values unique to a society and ensures the transmission of these values from generation to generation. Cultural heritage shapes individuals' lifestyles and spatial practices, and this influence is particularly evident in residential spaces. Changing living conditions, population growth, and environmental issues have brought the concept of sustainability. Along with globalization processes, the homogenization of individuals and increased sensitivity towards preserving their cultures have brought the concept of cultural sustainability to the forefront. The aim of this study is to examine cultural sustainability in the context of residential Architecture. Research has shown that studies on cultural sustainability in the context of the Aga Khan Architecture Awards are limited. This study, undertaken to fill this gap in the literature, evaluates the concept of cultural sustainability specifically in relation to residential buildings featured in the Aga Khan Architecture Awards. Qualitative research methods, namely documentation review and visual analysis, were used in this study. The data obtained were presented through graphical analysis and tables. These methods were used to investigate the spatial and semantic ways in which cultural sustainability is achieved at the residential scale. A comparative analysis was conducted across time and geography. The findings reveal that cultural sustainability is shaped by temporal and spatial conditions.

Keywords

culture, cultural sustainability, Aga Khan Architecture Awards, housing

1 Introduction

Culture is a concept that encompasses the material and spiritual values unique to a society and is used to transmit these values to future generations. It can also be defined as a system of learned, symbolic values and beliefs that shape the behavior of society members by influencing them across generations (Dizdaroğlu and Genli Yiğiter, 2015). These elements are often most visible in spaces, with daily life habits, rituals, and social relationships essentially taking shape within residential space. For this reason, residences stand out as the most concrete representation of cultural identity. In other words, housing can be considered a spatial ground where cultural continuity is produced. Within this framework, examining the manifestations of cultural sustainability in residential Architecture is essential for understanding how culture and space are established in architectural practice.

The concept of sustainability came to the fore during the eco-development debates at the 1972 World Environment Conference (İncedayı, 2004). Sustainability is a multidimensional concept in different ways, not only in its definition but also in the content of its dimensions and their interrelationships. In this context, the "basic triad" model that emerged in the 1990s focused on the ecological dimension, while the "four pillars" model developed later defined culture as a component of sustainability (Hawkes, 2001). With this model, cultural sustainability found its place within the definition of sustainability.

Architecture represents not only the production of shelter but also the concepts of identity and belonging. Although built with different ideas, the resulting form, materials, and spatial arrangements bear traces of culture (Beynon, 2010). As emphasised by Cengiz Bektaş,

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the Aga Khan Award-winning architect, Architecture is also a cultural production; to sustain the culture of a specific geography, it is first necessary to be aware of and recognise the geography within which that culture has developed. In this regard, contemporary architectural production will emerge as a unique locality where culture is sustained with awareness (Akyol et al., 2019). With this awareness, contemporary architectural production reflecting the uniqueness of local culture will emerge in the geography where culture is sustained.

Architecture, therefore, can be considered an important field of application for cultural sustainability, as it establishes the relationship between space and life and is not limited solely to the production of buildings. This context can also be explained by the way traditions and culture, as habits formed over historical processes, shape architectural space by regulating daily life. Culture and traditions establish bonds that create continuity and identify people with the place where they develop a sense of belonging. As a place of shelter, the home functions as an architectural metaphor in which the sense of belonging and continuity is directly produced (Eroğlu, 2024). Accordingly, residential Architecture can be considered one of the cases where discussions on cultural sustainability can be observed. The structure of housing, which is intertwined with humans and carries traces of culture, contains spatial elements that project the concept of cultural sustainability. This study focuses on residential projects evaluated under the Aga Khan Architecture Awards. This award program supports cultural diversity in the Islamic world, encouraging the preservation of traditional values and their continuation in harmony with contemporary Architecture.

1.1 Culture

Culture is a multifaceted and complex concept and has undergone many changes in meaning throughout history, with different definitions (Uysal Ürey, 2019). The Turkish Language Association dictionary defines culture as "the entirety of material and spiritual values created within the historical and social development process, along with the tools used to create and transmit these values to subsequent generations, demonstrating the extent of human mastery over their natural and social environment; customs, traditions" and "the entirety of thought and artistic works specific to a society or community" (TDK, 2026). UNESCO's 1982 Mexico Declaration on Cultural Policies defines culture as the distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features that characterize a society, encompassing "arts, lifestyles, human rights, value systems, traditions, and beliefs. Culture shapes individuals and societies, promoting unity through shared values and traditions" (UNESCO, 2026).

The concept of culture encompasses the entirety of a society's values, including its customs, traditions, beliefs, ideals, intellectual life, and artistic works. These values are highly valuable for ensuring unity and cohesion within society and for forming identity. The most important feature of culture is that it is shared by a society, passed down from generation to generation, and imbued with that society's value systems (Uysal Ürey, 2019). Culture contributes to the establishment of vibrant cities and communities where people can live, work, and play, and where they can also support social and economic well-being (Opoku, 2015). Societies' cultures are defined by the emergence of language, art, and architectural works (Ettehad et al., 2014). The experiences and habits that societies acquire from the events shape their way of life. These influences are passed on by individuals to future generations, contributing to the sustainability of the concept of culture. In this way, individuals who share the same feelings and experiences across generations become partners in a familiar feeling.

Culture is directly related to space, as it shapes societies and ensures the continuity of social memory. Individuals ensure continuity by reflecting their cultures in their lives and in the spaces they inhabit. Therefore, the concept of space is directly related to Architecture. Architecture encompasses the physical manifestations of culture through concrete examples of building forms, material choices, spatial organization variations, and construction techniques. Every architectural production provides insights into the social relationships, ways of life, and worldviews of the society to which it belongs, revealing that Architecture is not only an aesthetic and technical activity but also a vehicle for cultural expression.

1.2 Cultural sustainability

Culture, which is at the core of society and helps to define human needs and interests, plays a vital role in the development and progress of societies (Opoku, 2015). Culture, which changes and evolves over the years, transforms as it is passed down from generation to generation. Cultural elements that form societies' comfort zones create a need for preservation among people. However, culture can be positioned as a form of capital that shapes societies' environmental attitudes, including their habits and understandings of spatial production, beyond being a heritage to be preserved (Fithian and Powell, 2009).

Globalization is the social and economic interaction between countries and people that is bringing them closer together regardless of distance (Kıvılcım, 2013). Increased interaction between people is causing cultures to lose their uniqueness. However, by the end of the twentieth century, factors such as increased material consumption, human migration, and technological change raised questions about the roles of contemporary identity, tradition, locality, and architectural expression (Beynon, 2010). Both situations have contributed to the growing importance of cultural sustainability. Therefore, while the concept of sustainability previously consisted of three elements – ecological, economic, and social sustainability – the cultural dimension was added in the 20th century. The four-pillar model, as defined by Hawkes (2001), was proposed.

Kohler (2009) defines the social and cultural dimension of sustainability as human health and comfort, as well as the preservation of social and cultural values. Farsani et al. (2012), on the other hand, describe cultural sustainability as the preservation and restoration of cultural identities. Cultural sustainability is not limited to preserving the heritage of the past; it also aims to reconnect this heritage with contemporary lifestyles. However, undertaking work to achieve cultural sustainability is quite challenging because culture is variable and dynamic. Therefore, cultural sustainability does not mean making culture static but rather preserving cultural diversity and allowing culture to evolve (Chiu, 2004).

The relationship between culture, society, and the environment can be evaluated in a multifaceted way in the field of Architecture (İnceday ı, 2007). Efforts such as reproducing local knowledge, materials, and spatial organization forms in harmony with contemporary needs can be cited as methods for ensuring cultural sustainability in Architecture. This approach both ensures cultural continuity and strengthens local identity. Culturally sustainable design should raise awareness of valued places and support them (Memmott and Keys, 2015).

Architecture can be seen as one of the fundamental practitioners of cultural sustainability, not only in the building itself but also in the relationship it establishes with its surroundings and the life within it. Culturally sustainable Architecture can be defined as an integrated spatial space formed by selecting and arranging natural and artificial environmental elements around one or more activity areas or behavioral patterns. This structure integrates with specific behavioral norms and patterns of meaning; it also aims to enhance human comfort and quality of life by incorporating cultural constructs of space and time (Memmott and Keys, 2015).

1.3 Aga Khan Architecture Awards

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN, 2026a) was established in 1978 by Karim Aga Khan IV, a member of the Aga Khan family and the spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims. Comprising International non-denominational organizations, the AKDN works to improve the living conditions and opportunities of people living in the poorest and most vulnerable regions of the developing world, guided by the ethical principles of Islam. In addition to the awards given, the program, which includes regional and International conferences, workshops, publications, archival document projects, and educational programs held around the world, is effectively coordinated from its headquarters in Geneva (Bozdoğan, 1992).

The Aga Khan Awards for Architecture are presented every three years to projects in Architecture, planning practices, historic preservation, and landscape Architecture. They are administered by a board of trustees chaired by the founding leader. For each cycle, a new jury is formed comprising experts in the field, such as architects, engineers, or urban planners, to determine the eligibility criteria for projects. Each award cycle follows a step-by-step process, from the identification and submission of projects to the final announcement of the winning projects. First, candidates can apply individually or be nominated by others. Projects must meet the eligibility criteria for the award cycle. Candidates fill out an application form and send it to the center in Geneva. At its first meeting, the jury reviews the nominated projects and selects a shortlist of approximately 20 projects. These are then subject to on-site review by experts in the field, typically chosen by the awards office, such as architects, engineers, or urban planners. On-site project evaluators review each shortlisted project in detail outside their own countries to ensure objectivity, verify project data, and prepare reports by gathering additional information such as user feedback. At the second Jury meeting, the project evaluators give presentations to the jury members on each of the shortlisted projects. After evaluating the projects, the Main Jury selects the award winners (AKDN, 2026a).

The Aga Khan Architecture Awards aim to open the way for the development of Islamic society and to activate the intellectual channels necessary to change its image,

which has been associated with backwardness since the thirteenth century (Erdoğdu Erkarslan, 2001). The awards cover contemporary design, social housing, social development, restoration, reuse, and regional conservation projects that influence today's built environment and successfully interpret Islamic culture. They encompass all building types, from modest, small-scale projects to large complexes that are compatible with the historical fabric and environment (Özkan, 2022). During the selection process, architectural designs that not only meet the physical, social, and economic needs of buildings but also emphasize cultural expectations are prioritized. In this context, the Aga Khan Architecture Awards fill an essential gap in the field of Architecture and serve as a significant resource for cultural sustainability initiatives.

2 Gap in the literature

2.1 Cultural sustainability

Cultural sustainability has become an increasingly prominent area of interest in architectural and planning literature, particularly in terms of its socio-cultural dimensions. Studies in this field reveal that approaches such as repurposing, conservation, and sensitive planning play a decisive role in maintaining cultural identity, social interaction, and the local economy. They examine how cultural values are reflected in the physical environment at different spatial scales, primarily in residential, public, and educational structures (Aydın and Okuyucu, 2009; Chiu, 2004; Dizdaroğlu and Genli Yiğiter, 2015). Research that goes beyond Western-centered theoretical approaches emphasizes the importance of frameworks that focus on the spatial practices and meaning production processes of local cultures (Memmott and Keys, 2015) while regional studies focused on the preservation and repurposing of traditional fabric reveal the practical implications of socio-cultural sustainability (Ayıran, 2011; Dikmen and Toruk, 2016).

In this regard, local and regional studies examine the relationship between cultural sustainability and architectural form and spatial organization through concrete examples. Beyhan (2004) highlights the importance of these elements in the formation and continuity of cultural identity by revealing the impact of social life, folkloric characteristics, and local and traditional elements on architectural structures. Ayıran (2011) examines cultural sustainability within the framework of the concept of contextual continuity using the case of Bodrum, noting that formal characteristics such as street layout, number of floors, facade color and material, roof form, and window proportions are decisive in ensuring this continuity. Dikmen and Toruk (2018) emphasize the need to document and preserve spatial characteristics, plan schemes, and construction techniques to ensure that urban fabric and structures with traditional qualities are passed on to future generations.

Studies examining the relationship between cultural identity, architectural form, and globalization note that increasing standardization in architectural production weakens local context and propose contextual design principles (Beynon, 2010; Galal Ahmed, 2011). Ateş (2021), examining the reflections of intercultural interaction on architectural form, demonstrates that motifs and forms used in Architecture are carriers of cultural values through the example of Andalusian horseshoe arches; Wang et al. (2024) state that culture gains meaning in architectural design through building appearance, material use, and decorative elements, evaluating the relationship between architectural style and culture within a holistic framework. On the other hand, whether cultural sustainability is a fundamental component of sustainability or a supporting dimension is debated in the literature (Soini and Birkeland, 2014). The failure of current evaluation systems to consider socio-cultural criteria sufficiently creates a significant theoretical and practical gap (Çahantimur and Turgut Yıldız, 2008; Süzer, 2020).

2.2 Aga Khan Architecture Awards

The literature on the Aga Khan Architecture Awards (AKAA) (AKDN, 2026a) offers a multi-layered discussion that highlights the award's characteristics and importance, while also relating the concepts of regionalism, locality, and cultural continuity to contemporary architectural production. The studies examine the working system, characteristics, and contributions of the Aga Khan awards to the field of Architecture; how the regionalist approach shaped by Hassan Fathy's influence has been reproduced as an alternative to Western-centric styles in Turkey and different geographies; and the construction of architectural identity through the integration of local materials, topography, climate, and modern technologies (Erarslan, 2020; Kuyrukçu, 2020; Özkan, 1995). While the place-bound nature and role of religious and public structures in cultural continuity are emphasized (Nursanty and Husni, 2020), discussions on spatial economy, educational structures, and social benefit through the relationship between technology and Architecture and the discourse of "poor Architecture" have come to the fore in the context of the award since the 2000s (Aycı, 2021a; 2021b).

Recent studies, however, question the potential for qualitative assessment of common global design indicators by evaluating AKAA within the context of critical regionalism, glocalized Architecture, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Salkhi Khasraghi and Mehan, 2023; Yıldız Kuyrukçu and Özkan, 2023); on the other hand, Berlanda (2025) approaches the award as a cultural apparatus that shapes the discourse of modern Architecture and operates within postcolonial power relations, using the example of Sub-Saharan Africa. It is clear from the literature that cultural sustainability and the Aga Khan Architecture Awards are approached from different perspectives. Studies conducted within the scope of the Aga Khan Architecture Awards, however, reveal that research on the relationship between cultural sustainability and residential Architecture is limited. Thus, the originality of this research and its contribution to the literature are evident.

3 Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research method, specifically documentation and visual analysis. Through these methods, the qualitative investigation of traces of cultural sustainability in residential projects evaluated for the Aga Khan Architecture Awards was conducted. Within the scope of the research, residential projects will first be selected, and their characteristics and cultural sustainability discourses will be tabulated (Table 1). Then, the works will be analytically tabulated (Table 2) within the framework of the criteria determined by the literature review, and the manifestations of cultural sustainability will be discussed in terms of years and geographies.

3.1 Selection of case studies

The sample project selection for the study was conducted using the project finder tool on the Aga Khan Architecture Awards' official website (AKDN, 2026b). All projects evaluated for the awards from 1978, when the awards began, to the most recent award cycle (2025) were analyzed. Upon examining the award cycle, it was found that 218 projects were evaluated for the awards; these projects were then detailed as shortlisted and award-winning groups. This examination identified 29 residential projects. Among the projects, the Hafsia Quarter I project in the 1981-1983 cycle and the Dar Lamane Housing project in the 1984-1986 cycle included commercial and office buildings in addition to housing. The Azem Place restoration project, located in the 1981-1983 cycle, and the Manouchery House, located in the 2014-2016 cycle, were converted into a boutique hotel/textile center from an old residential building. The Courtyard House Plugin structure, located in the 2017-2019 cycle, was excluded from the research scope because it was an extension project. The Renovation of Niemeyer Guest House from the 2020-2022 cycle was not included in the research scope because, although it was used as a guest house, it did not involve residential use.

3.2 Selection of analysis criteria

To identify traces of cultural sustainability in projects are conceptually evaluated within the scope of sustainability. The literature on culture, identity, and the architectural environment is reviewed within the framework of local values, contextual continuity, and socio-cultural sustainability, emphasizing that architectural production is not only a physical but also a cultural and social process. The literature review shows that cultural sustainability can be interpreted through spatial characteristics, plan layouts, structural elements, building materials, construction techniques, and cultural motifs. Within the scope of the research, the following six criteria will be the focus of reflections on cultural sustainability in residential buildings. The findings from the evaluation conducted in line with these criteria will be presented in tables; the methods used will be systematically compared.

1. The relationship between traditional form and plan schemes and traditional living culture (Beyhan, 2004; Dikmen and Toruk, 2018);
2. Use of local materials in buildings (Ayıran 2011; Wang et al., 2024);
3. Use of traditional construction techniques and craftsmanship (Dikmen and Toruk, 2018);
4. Use of traditional building elements in contemporary building scale (Ayıran, 2011);
5. Reflections of symbolic values (Ateş, 2021; Beyhan, 2004);
6. The existence of shared spaces that support traditional spatial organization and social cohesion (Ayıran, 2011; Beyhan, 2004; Dikmen and Toruk, 2018).

4 Findings

Since the awards were first presented, at least one residential project has been evaluated by the jury each year. Projects from the early years of the awards are included in the award group category. In recent years, residential projects have primarily been included in the shortlist.

Table 1 General information about selected structures and cultural sustainability discourses (the photos in table were taken from the AKDN (2026a) website)

Award cycle	Building image	Building name Architect (country)	Location	Award status	Cultural sustainability discourse
		Halawa House Abdel Wahed El-Wakil (Egypt)	Agamy, Egypt	Award Recipient	• Traditional Egyptian and Islamic architectural prototype • Upper Egyptian construction technique (masonry and stonework tradition) • Use of limestone specific to the region • Porch (takhtabush) and wind catcher (malqaf); niches (liwan); stone benches (mastaba); viewing terrace (maq'ad); sloped entrances; Mashrabiyas, stained glass windows (Holod and Rastorfer,1983a)
1978-1980		Ertegün House Turgut Cansever (Türkiye)	Bodrum, Türkiye	Award Recipient	• Thick columns resembling the "Lamba" pillars used in traditional Architecture • Local pine wood beams, terracotta-covered floor (Özkan, n.d.)
		Courtyard Houses Jean-François Zevaco (Morocco)	Agadir, Morocco	Award Recipient	• Courtyard house experience used in design • Living spaces reflecting Moroccan lifestyle (Holod and Rastorfer,1983b)
1981-1983		Nail Çakırhan Residance Nail Çakırhan (Türkiye)	Akyaka, Türkiye	Award Recipient	• Methods of local builders • Traces of Ula Architecture • Roofs covered with red round Turkish tiles typical of the region • Use of divanhane corresponding to the eyvana found in traditional Ottoman houses (Cantacuzino, 1985)
1987-1989		Gürel Family Summer Residance Sedat Gürel (Türkiye)	Çanakkale, Türkiye	Award Recipient	• Local materials (wood, stone, clay tiles) • Traditional construction techniques (brickwork) • The positioning of buildings, their inward orientation, • Traditional architectural forms (Algan and Dalay, 2021)

Table 1 General information about selected structures and cultural sustainability discourses (the photos in table were taken from the AKDN (2026) website) (continued)

Award cycle	Building image	Building name Architect (country)	Location	Award status	Cultural sustainability discourse
1990-1992		Demir Summer Village Turgut Cansever, Emine Ögün, Mehmet Ögün, and Feyza Cansever (Türkiye)	Bodrum, Türkiye	Award Recipient	• Use of local stones and wood materials • Residential orientation that prioritizes privacy and closeness • Similarity of spatial dimensions to those in local Architecture, traces of local Architecture (rectangular prism form) (Öksüzoğlu, 2022)
1993-1995		Aranya Community Housing Balkrishna V. Doshi (Hindistan)	Indore, India	Award Recipient	• The use of the open-air platform "otta," a local element of Indian Architecture (a gathering place) (Hidden Architecture, 2026)
		Hafsia Quarter II Abdelaziz Daoulatli, Sémia Akrouche-Yaïche, Achraf Bahri-Meddeb (Tunisia)	Tunis, Tunisia	Award Recipient	• Two-story houses positioned around an inner courtyard, narrow and winding streets (traditional model), • Latticework, accentuated corner details (Fadel, 2013)
1996-1998		Salinger Residence Jimmy CS Lim (Malaysia)	Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia	Award Recipient	• Traditional Architecture (Extended eaves, structure elevated on stilts, • Built by local craftsmen (carpenters) (AKDN, 2026a)
2002-2004		B2 House Han Tümertekin (Türkiye)	Çanakkale, Türkiye	Award Recipient	• Local materials • Local construction techniques • Direct connection with the surroundings, without enclosing the house with walls like local village houses (Arkitektuel, 2026)

Table 1 General information about selected structures and cultural sustainability discourses (the photos in table were taken from the AKDN (2026) website) (continued)

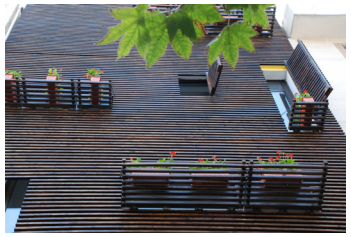
Award cycle	Building image	Building name Architect (country)	Location	Award status	Cultural sustainability discourse
2005-2007		Moulmein Rise Residential Building WOHA Architects (Singapore)	Singapore	Award Recipient	• Traditional monsoon window • Facade design inspired by the patterns of the Elhamra Mosque in Morocco (Ali, 2013)
		Palmyra House Studio Mumbai Architects (India)	Alibagh, India	Shortlisted	• Use of traditional ain tree, local basalt, local Palmyra palm (Low, 2013) Traditional mortise and tenon construction technique (Giuroiu, 2024)
2008-2010		Dowlat II Residential Complex Arsh Design Studio (India)	Tehran, Iran	Shortlisted	• Traditional material used on the facade (narrad wood) • Local construction technology (masonry) (Samhouri, 2013)
		Tulou Collective Housing URBANUS Architecture & Design Inc. (China)	China	Shortlisted	• Inspired by traditional tulou houses • Creates an interaction space for the community (rectangular talou) (Mallick, 2013)

Table 1 General information about selected structures and cultural sustainability discourses (the photos in table were taken from the AKDN (2026) website) (continued)

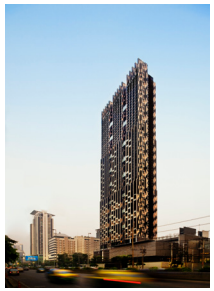
Award cycle	Building image	Building name Architect (country)	Location	Award status	Cultural sustainability discourse
2011-2013		Apartment No. 1 AbCT - Architecture by Collective Terrain (Korea)	Mahallat, Iran	Shortlisted	• Local materials (stone, wood, brick) • Small windows suitable for the neighborhood Architecture • Traditional Taghche interpretation in the interior (Radoine, 2013)
		The Met Tower WOHA Architects, ngapore)	Bangkok, Thailand	Shortlisted	• Symbols unique to Thailand have been embodied. (WOHA, 2026)
2014-2016		40 Knots House Habibeh Madjdabadi, Alireza Meşhadi Mirza (Iran)	Tahran, Iran	Shortlisted	• Local material (brick) • Facade texture reminiscent of Persian carpet weaving technique • A modern interpretation of mashrabiya latticework • The local dome design known as "gonbad" has been interpreted as a contemporary skylight in the structure (Radoine, 2016)
2017-2019		AM Residence Andramatin Architect, Jakarta, Indonesia	Jakarta, Indonesia	Shortlisted	• Inspired by elevated local stilt houses in the design (AKDN, 2026a)

Table 1 General information about selected structures and cultural sustainability discourses (the photos in table were taken from the AKDN (2026) website) (continued)

Award cycle	Building image	Building name Architect (country)	Location	Award status	Cultural sustainability discourse
2020-2022		Aban House USE Stüdyo (Iran)	İsfahan, İran	Shortlisted	• Inspired by the traditional 3 × 3 division model • Local materials (brick, ceramic) (Dada, 2022)
		Niamey 2000 United4design (USA)	Niamey, Niger	Shortlisted	• Soil-based local material • A contemporary interpretation of the traditional courtyard layout (Ibrahim, 2022)
		Expandable House Stephen Cairns with Miya Irawati, Azwan Aziz, Dioguna Putra and Sumiadi Rahman (Indonesia)	Batam Riau Islands, Indonesia	Shortlisted	• Local materials (Meranti and Bangkirailumber) (Habitusliving, 2026)
		Wafra Wind Tower AGi Architects(Kuwait)	Kuwait City, Kuwait	Shortlisted	• The design incorporates a developed version of the traditional Middle Eastern courtyard typology (Agi-Architects, 2026).
2023-2025		Khudi Bari Marina Tabassum Architects (Bangladesh)	Bangladesh	Award Recipient	• Architectural design reflecting traditional houses • Locally sourced bamboo frame (Archdaily, 2026)

Table 2 Cultural sustainability analyses of selected structures

Building name	Award cycle	Building location	Traditional form and plan scheme – relationship with traditional culture	Use of local/ traditional materials	Use of traditional construction techniques	Traditional building elements	Reflections on symbolic values	Traditional spatial organization/ spaces supporting social cohesion
Hawala House		Egypt	•	•	•	•		
Ertegün House	1978-1980	Türkiye		•		•		
Courtyard Houses		Morocco	•					•
Nail Çakırhan Residence	1981-1983	Türkiye	•	•	•		•	•
Gürel Family Summer Residence	1987-1989	Türkiye	•	•	•			•
Demir Holiday Village	1990-1992	Türkiye	•	•				•
Aranya Community Housing	1993-1995	India						•
Hafsia Quarter II		Tunisia				•		•
Salinger Residence	1996-1998	Malaysia	•		•			
B2 House	2002-2004	Türkiye		•	•			•
Moulmein Rise Residential Building	2005-2007	Singapore				•	•	
Palmyra House		India		•	•			
Dowlat II Residential Complex	2008-2010	Iran		•	•			
Tulou Collective Housing		China	•					•
Apartment No. 1	2011-2013	Iran	•	•			•	
The Met Tower		Thailand					•	
40 Knots House	2014-2016	Iran		•		•	•	
AM Residence	2017-2019	Indonesia	•					
Aban House		Iran	•	•				
Niamey 2000	2020-2022	Niger		•				•
Expandable House		Indonesia		•				
Wafa Wind Tower		Kuwait						•
Khudi Bari	2023-2025	Bangladesh	•	•				

Over the years, the number of awarded projects has decreased, and residential projects have been excluded from this award. Looking at the geographical distribution of the award-winning projects in the competition (Fig. 1), the majority of the residential projects evaluated by the jury are located in Asia. Turkey and Iran are particularly prominent countries in terms of award-winning residential projects. It was evaluated that residential projects located in countries with Islamic geography, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, were not included in the evaluation. The evaluation of residential projects in China, Thailand, and Singapore under the Aga Khan Architecture Awards can be linked to the presence of Muslim populations in these countries. The prevalence of cultural sustainability discourse in these countries, compared to Arab countries,may be related to the inclusiveness and openness to globalization in the architectural discourse of countries in the Far East. In countries with a high density of modern construction and a limited density of traditional building such as Kuwait, the scarcity of local and cultural discourse is striking. It is observed that the number of award-winning countries and the number of awards in Africa are low (Fig. 1). This is associated with the economic and social capabilities of the countries (Table 1).

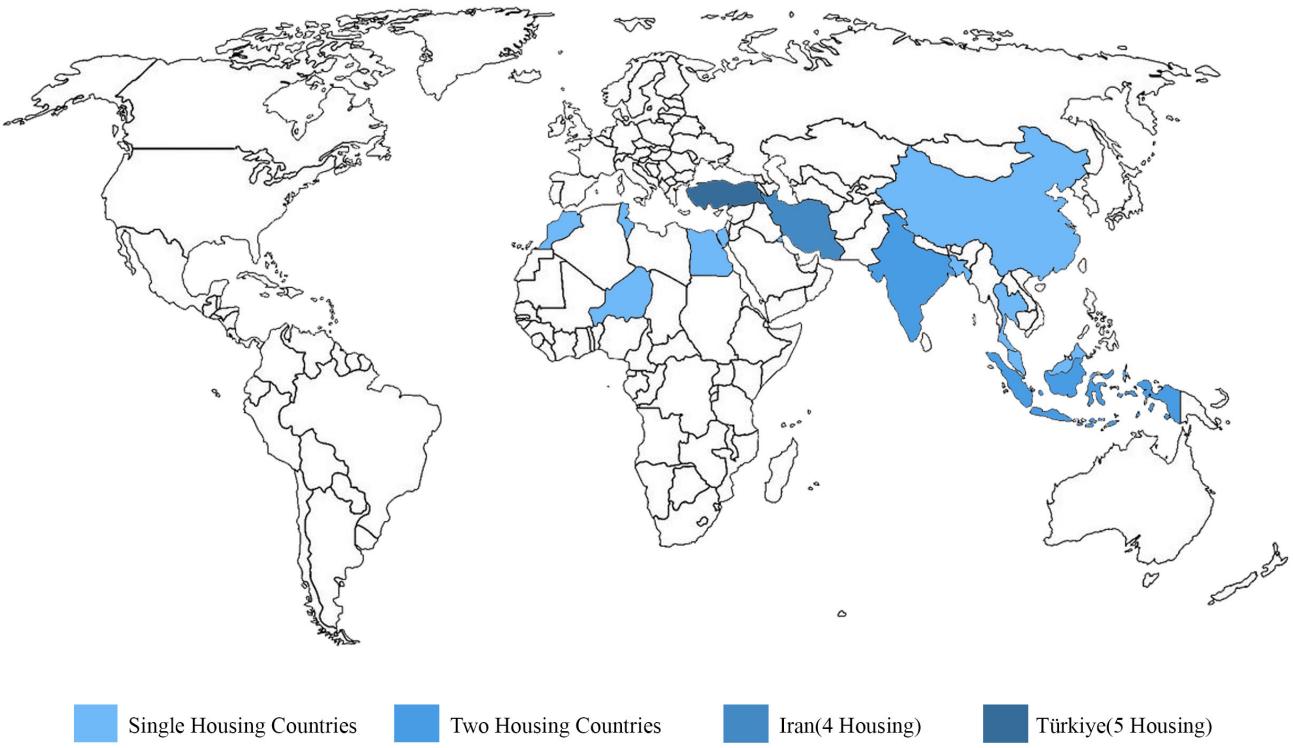


Fig. 1 Density analysis of housing project included in the Aga Khan Architecture Award

Within the scope of the study, when the contents of the projects that received awards in the competition were evaluated (Table 1), it was observed that the number of projects shortlisted and awarded was close to each other; the projects were mostly low-rise and small-scale structures. It was determined that the discourse on cultural sustainability in multi-story buildings remained at a symbolic level. This situation is thought to be related to the year and geography in which the projects were implemented. When the visuals of the buildings were examined, traces of the architectural language of the geography in which they were designed were found. Discourses of cultural sustainability in buildings have decreased over the years. When the table is evaluated within the framework of the criteria determined, it is seen that cultural sustainability has been achieved with a small number of criteria over the years. It was found that the majority of the designers of the buildings received awards for buildings they designed in their own countries. In addition, designs by Turgut Cansever and WOHA Architecture have been awarded multiple times. Within the framework of the table, it was observed that architectural firms were awarded more often than individual designs (Table 1).

It has been determined that the criteria focused on by the countries included in the scope of the research in the context of cultural sustainability differ from one another. Each country has evaluated cultural sustainability in different ways. Iran and Turkey, in particular, are prominent countries in terms of the use of cultural sustainability criteria. It can be said that they have strong discourses in the context of cultural sustainability. In some countries, cultural sustainability is interpreted based on a single criterion. This situation can be linked to the outward-looking architectural structure of the country where the building is located. The prominence of local material use can be associated with the easy availability of the material in the region, the acceleration of construction, and the ease of access for the local population (Fig. 2).

It has been observed that the buildings in the early stages of the award cycle included different criteria related to cultural sustainability, whereas in later years, traces of cultural sustainability in houses were sometimes interpreted using a single criterion. This supports the idea that cultural elements have been analyzed in a modern way or have been completely lost over the years. The relationship between traditional form and plan layout with conventional culture is evident in the Hawala house-Gürel Family structures through conventional form, while in the Aban House, it is only evident in the plan layout; the Salinger House-Khudi Bari was built on raised pillars, referencing other structures in the region, and in the Nail Çakırhan house, designs similar to traditional spaces were applied (Table 2).

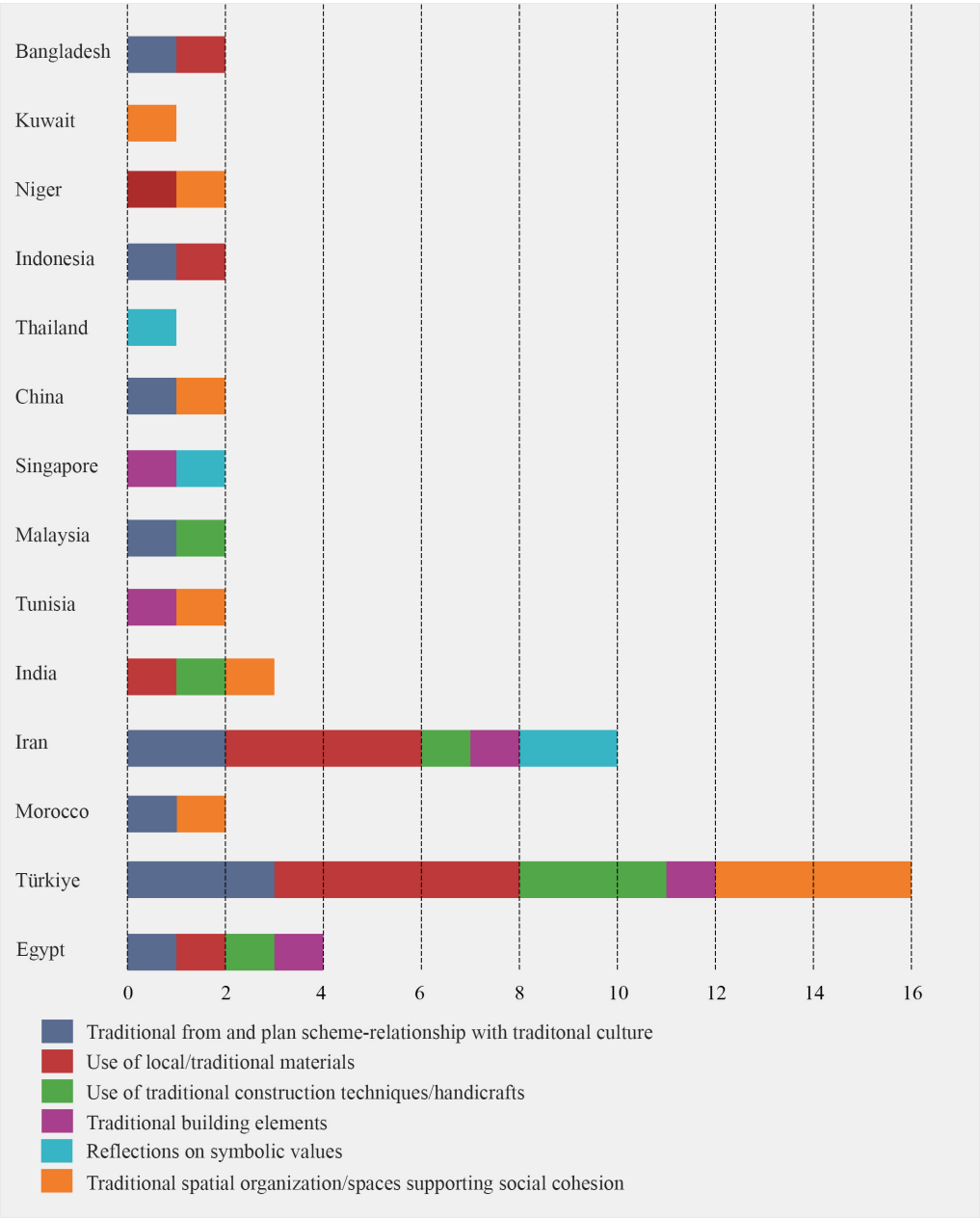


Fig. 2 Distribution of criterion intensity by country

Findings related to the use of local/traditional materials indicate that cultural sustainability at the building scale is achieved primarily through locally sourced materials or those that have become region-specific. This criterion includes materials obtained from the region and those specific to it. Instead of interpreting the intensity of local material use in designs solely through cultural sustainability, it is possible to interpret it through the other pillars of sustainability, namely ecological and economic sustainability. These findings prove that materials sourced from the region's geography are used as an effective means in almost every aspect of sustainability in the construction sector (Table 2). The use of traditional construction techniques was particularly prominent in previous years (Hawala House, Nail Çakırhan Residence, Gürel Family Summer Residence, Salinger House, B2 House, Palmyra House, Dowlat II Residential Complex) but has not been used in the context of cultural sustainability since 2010. A review of project reports indicates that local workers were employed during implementation, but they were evaluated only in terms of labor force (Table 2). The use of traditional architectural elements is particularly evident in the early stages of the award. Windows (mashrabiyas), which are elements of Islamic Architecture, stand out in this regard (Hawala House, Hafsia Quarter II). Building elements have found their place in designs, not in their

original form, but generally developed and interpreted (Ertegün House, 40 Knots House (Table 2). Reflections on symbolic values have been achieved through modern interpretations of local and cultural elements, fort example reflections on symbolic values. The use of contemporary interpretations of mashrabiya or Persian weaving techniques as cultural references in facade design (40 Knots House), or the use of mosque patterns in facade design (Moulmein Rise Residential Building); interpretations of traditional interior elements (Nail Çakırhan Residence, Apartment No. 1), or the inclusion of Thai-inspired tiles or symbols in designs (The Met Tower) can be cited as examples (Table 2). Traditional spatial organization/spaces that support the social cohesion criterion refer to the creation of courtyards, inward-facing structures, and designs that prioritize privacy. This spatial organization once again highlights the importance of privacy in Islamic geography. The creation of spaces where people can come together, valued by designers for fostering social 50 to the continuation of shared culture. These organizational forms, exemplified using courtyards, were present in the early years of the award with traditional interpretations (Courtyard Houses, Aranya Community Housing, Hafsia Quarter II). In contrast, in later years they appeared in residential buildings with modern interpretations (Tulou Collective Housing, Niamey 2000, Wafa Wind Tower) (Table 2).

5 Conclusion

Cultural sustainability manifests itself in various forms, but it is often interpreted through building materials. However, it would be inaccurate to view this solely as a cultural reflection. The use of locally sourced building materials contributes not only to cultural sustainability but also supports economic and environmental sustainability. This multidimensional impact suggests that, in some cases, designers do not consider cultural sustainability as a primary goal, but rather as an outcome that intersects with other dimensions of sustainability. Analyses clearly reveal the decisive role of time and geography in cultural sustainability. Technological transformations and the increasing gap in development between societies have transformed the methods and forms of expression of cultural sustainability. Whereas in the past, cultural traces were mostly conveyed through traditional interpretations, contemporary examples demonstrate that similar elements are being reproduced through contemporary design approaches. This conveys that cultural sustainability has been adapted to current conditions over time and integrated into contemporary design practice.

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