

## Turkey

### Modern Architectures in History

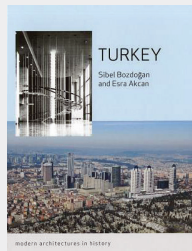
By Sibel Bozdoğan and Esra Akcan

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THIS BOOK is written as part of the series on “Modern Architectures in History.” Yet, it covers much more than architecture and urbanism in modern Turkey. It is a comprehensive study that relates the production of the physical environment to larger forces shaped by the economy (capitalism) and the state. Moreover, it demonstrates how the architectural environment is used by the Turkish state to ‘shape’ society. The different practices and ideologies from various eras are well articulated; detailed information as well as a large variety of photographs and drawings are provided to present a contextualized summary of modern architecture and urbanism in present-day Turkey. Consequently, I can say that the book is the product of a commitment to excellence both in content and visual presentation.

That said, the chapters, which are briefly mentioned below, are not equally captivating in terms of the content material. The broad range of issues covered in the book makes it challenging to maintain the level of engagement with each subject. The authors are more successful in the first chapters and with those subjects directly related to design and architecture (detailed information on the design principles, construction techniques and material is provided on single buildings and complexes) than with those subjects that remain outside of the architectural discipline (for example, the gecekondu phenomenon



has social, political, economic, cultural and experiential components in addition to the spatial/physical dimension).

The book has nine chapters, starting with the 1920s and ending with the 2000s. The chapters are periodized

as the early modernization project, the liberal democratic and populist era of the 1950s, the planned era of the 1960s, the politically charged years of the 1970s, and the globalization era since the 1980s under the hegemonic discourse and practice of neoliberalism and the cultural politics of post-modernity. The coup d'états of 1960 and 1980, and the memorandum of 1971, are discussed in a separate chapter. The first three chapters “Architecture of Revolution,” “Building for the Modern Nation” and “the Modern House” are about the early Republican period and examine the attempts of the Republican elite to use architecture and urban planning as a means to ‘modernize’ and ‘enlighten’ society. Specific examples are given about the production of places by the Republican elite, who were committed to reflecting their modernization ideology onto the public space and reinforcing it through space. As part of the larger project of building a ‘modern’ society, foreign planners were invited to plan the construction of Ankara, the new capital of modern Turkey. Foreign architects were commissioned to design official buildings, exhibition halls and higher education buildings as well as factories and

cooperative housing. There was much effort put into building 'modern' cities and factory towns, and even 'modern' villages (the authors do indicate the extent to which these 'modern village' projects were implemented). Yet the effort to impose the elites' imagined model failed, as these ideals were soon defeated by 'reality.'

This section also elaborates on the contestation over the elements of Turkish architectural style. Designers of buildings and towns had to deal with the conflicting forces of internationalization and nationalism: the designed objects (with particular attention paid to the Turkish house) should break from the traditional past and relate to the modern world, yet they should carry the characteristics of the Turkish identity.

The fourth section, "Populist Democracy and Post-war Modernism," is about the 'reality' that undermined the Republican ideals: populist politics, international capitalism and gecekondu in the urban space. The 'redevelopment' and 'renewal' of Istanbul, which had previously been left in Ankara's shade, became the mission of the elected prime minister in the era of multi-party politics. New boulevards were built and many cut through the city's historic peninsula, causing a massive demolition; many buildings including historic wooden houses and warehouses of the Ottoman period were torn down in this process. This radical intervention into the city's urban fabric was legitimized by the notion that the congested neighborhoods of the Ottoman era were the source of health problems and that the city should be modernized through rational planning that emphasized "openness, spaciousness and cleanliness" (p. 108). With this idea in mind, a public promenade park (İnönü Gezisi) was built during the 1940s, yet it could not escape the loss of some of its land

to the construction of the Hilton Hotel as a symbol of Turkey's new alliance with United States. Unfortunately, the connection between the Hilton and Gezi is not mentioned in the book. Architecturally, the Hilton presented a new design paradigm: a horizontal block with a reinforced concrete grid. The 'international style' of the Hilton building was compensated by using themes (e.g., the Tulip room), architectural objects (the domed şadırvans) and materials (such as the ceramic tiles) associated with the local context in its decoration and advertisement.

While the prime minister of the time was busy transforming Istanbul into a planned modern city with the use of the state's limited financial resources, rural-to-urban migration triggered by the mechanization of agriculture was transforming the city and gecekondu (squatter settlements) were built in increasing numbers.

In chapter five, "Housing in the Metropolis," the authors mention squatter settlements built by poor migrants from the countryside, apartment buildings – referred to as 'anonymous' apartmentse – built by small contractors, and architecturally-designed buildings of the new bourgeoisie. As small contractors continued building apartment blocks by tearing down single family houses, which was enabled by the Condominium Law of 1965, and rural migrants struggled to build their houses on public land, architects faced the challenge of designing "the modern Turkish home" for their new clients. Cooperative housing projects, which initially aimed to respond to poor families' needs but were largely co-opted by the middle class, are also presented in this chapter, along with projects sponsored by banks, enriching the text with a large variety of photographs. However, one problem with this chapter is the underdevel-

oped study of the gecekondus: the question of why the gecekondus persisted in Turkey dismisses the fact that similar ‘informal’ housing also developed in other cities in the capitalist Third World. Even John Turner, a UN consultant, advocated for squatter accommodations as ‘self-help housing’ to solve the housing problem of the urban poor.

Chapter six, “Architecture under Coups d’état,” demonstrates the urban development initiated in the planned period by the coup d’état of 1960 and its failure under spreading gecekondus, shrinking economic resources and the politicization of society. This is the period when the Chamber of Architects defined its mission to be a socially responsible community, creating disputes among its members about the appropriate degree of political engagement for the association. The contested changes in the architectural style, along with disputed projects – the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul and the Kocatepe Mosque in Ankara – are also presented in this section, again complemented by first-class photographs.

The last three chapters are concerned with the radical changes that followed the military coup of 1980. Both the liberalization of the economy and Turkey’s integration into global markets, as well as the increasing role of Islam in society, triggered major transformations in society, which was reflected in the urban landscape in terms of gated communities, luxurious residences and mushrooming shopping centers. Following the legalization of the gecekondus by the Gecekondu Amnesty Law of 1984, apartment blocks were constructed up to four storeys high to replace the gecekondus. This was accompanied by the explosion in the construction of mosques and the boom in summer resorts for tourists. The authors offer examples for each of these

developments, categorized into three themes in chapter seven (“Spaces of Consumption,” “Political Islam, Mosque Architecture and Neo-Ottomanism,” and “Tourism and the Paradoxes of Identity”), and under the title, “New Wealth, New Suburbia and Gated Communities,” in chapter eight. In the following section, ‘TOKI social housing’ is also discussed, showing the controversy over the practice of ‘urban transformation projects’ that were implemented both in the inner city historic areas and the gecekondus on the cities’ peripheries. Yet, a discussion on the design of today’s mushrooming private and public university campuses are missing from the book. Moreover, mega-projects in Istanbul, such as the Galataport, Haliçport and Haydarpaşa Project, as well as the Financial Center at Ataşehir, could have been given more attention, since they drastically altered the urban fabric, are globally-oriented, and are probably detrimental to the local population.

The most problematic part in this section is the treatment of the gecekondus and its transformation into apartment blocks as the “Illegal City.” On page 238, it reproduces the stigma placed on former gecekondus residents as the ‘undeserving rich.’ To use the term ‘slum profiteers’ exacerbates such a stigma. Also, the authors fail to recognize that many gecekondus owners could not afford to pay for the titles to their land. Moreover, the buildings that replaced the gecekondus were quite decent in some cases, despite the fact that many lacked the ‘architectural style’ of buildings designed by professionals. I would use the term ‘the Illegal City’ for the projects built by the state’s neoliberal TOKI and the capital’s big construction firms and large-scale private developers. These projects transformed the city for profit and were built by either bypassing laws or making amendments to laws.

The book ends with chapter nine – “The ‘Young Turk Architects’ of Globalization” – in which the projects of the younger generation of architects are presented, along with their ideas about the role of the architectural profession in society. The authors present a critical evaluation of the young architects of neoliberal/global Turkey: different from their early counterparts, “they were young yet submissive, creative yet gentrifying, able to carve out possibilities from limited opportunities yet unable to criticize opportunism, competent in the transnational arena of the profession yet helpless in the face of the country’s own daunting problems” (p. 296).

In summary, the role given to architects and urban planners in the modernization efforts of the early Republican elites in the 1930s and 1940s was taken over by rural-to-urban migrants, who created their own housing, and small developers who built for the urban middle class in the 1950s and 1960s; today, it is neither the modernizing state nor the people that have been transforming cities for profit, but rather the international and/or national capital. The authors document these processes well in both visual and written form. The names of the architects and their projects are provided in many cases, documenting the recent history of the field, which increases the

value of the book. It connects people, places, events and ideas in the creation of the ‘modern’ Turkish environment and the struggles over its production. As one reads the book, he or she learns not only about architecture, but also about modern Turkey’s major political events, social problems and economic policies, all related to discursive and spatial practices in the country. This makes the book interesting not only to design practitioners and academics, but also to those interested in Turkish society. The book is enjoyable to read, and the photographs contribute much to its appeal for professionals, academics and laypeople alike.

However, there are minor errors. For example the turban was never outlawed (p. 17); Alevis are not an ethnic group like the Kurds, Greeks, Jews and Armenians (p. 99); the condominium law was passed in 1965 and not in 1966 (p. 161); and TOKI was initially connected to the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement (Bayındırlık ve İskan Bakanlığı) and became connected to the Prime Ministry by a law that was passed in 2004. Also, using ‘Kemalist’ as adjective in many cases (the Kemalist state, the Kemalist elite, the Kemalist revolution, Kemalist Turkey, Kemalist stylistic preferences, etc.) seems to be imposing a particular ideological stance onto the description of events.