

A View on Turkish Architecture in the Last Decades: Is Architecture Becoming an Intellectual Hobby?

MINE INCEOGLU

Istanbul Technical University

Architecture and urban space enhance our cultural identity depending on our frame of references and reflects the socio-economic context of its inherent environment. Anatolia having been subjected to numerous influences inherited many architectural styles of the culture that dominated it at various times and the communities living at various periods. Turkish architects were aware of immense cultural diversity of their land, Anatolia's historical background and her rich architectural heritage as Antique, Byzantine, Roman, Islamic, Ottoman and a variety of vernacular and regional cultural forms. In Turkey, as in any other place in the world with a close relationship to other cultures, there has always been a constant exchange of ideas, culture and architectural styles. Powerful economies have exported not just their products such as furniture, building materials and technology; also their styles, architects, city planners and educational programs. Turkish architecture has been effected and dominated by Western thought and architecture since the middle of 18.th century.

Specially after 1960 global, information based techno-culture affected our physical environment transforming our sense of place and cultural identity particular to our cities and our districts. The growth of the cities, new developments which usually goes in front of planning process, affected the urban scope, urban space and the scale. Kuban (1) indicates that even before the period of rapid industrialization there were imported architectural styles but they were always modified to suit the new location, available technology and local climate by fusing some of their essential features with the vocabulary of local architecture. After industrialization period, new technologies, especially the use of reinforced concrete by local people, the need for mass produced housing and buildings to meet the demands of an immense growth of city population, economic exploitation of cities by speculators generated new value systems. Popular culture was shaped by daily practical anxieties and short term needs rather than long-term perspectives. The use of advanced technology increased economic wealth more rapidly than the development of socio-cultural values, ethics and knowledge in developing countries. Modernism and information based unified global techno-culture has been accused of being disrespectful to the past cultural and aesthetic qualities. More important however the provocation of speculators exploiting disadvantages of a less organized society which is less educated and faced difficult conditions. The result is a dramatic deterioration of the environment.

Although change is an inescapable reality of our life and the duality of meta and sub cultures is an unavoidable fact all over the world, the socio-cultural differences between the elite and the popular culture in the third world countries is as wide as their income. Populist tendencies in Turkey dominate the political systems and effects the values of the society. Each culture creates its own reality, the culture in which architecture is assimilated. Most of the population, including most of the architects, decision makers, politicians as a part of this popular culture, don't feel the disturbance of this chaotic and distorted

environment. Such an environment is more related to their popular cultural values, quality of the environment is less important than meeting quantitative expectations.

Ugur Tanyeli indicates that the third world architects are in a conflict of being employed by a small, rich, elite minority and have to work for them; and on the other hand being aware of the main problems of the community is not able to be solved by architects nor architecture. The difficulties to claim the social validity of the profession and therefore architects tends to create a fictive responsibility for themselves, they want to convince us and themselves that although they design for elite, these buildings inherits a meaningful cultural contents for the community. The great amount of increase in symbolic content and the cultural context of architectural products in Turkey may be the result of these responsibility of the architects for the community they born and educated in or the new trends in architecture giving more emphasize on meaning of the building and identity of the place.

What we are discussing as the recent Turkish architectural activity and products are the outcome of an elitist production process which is serving privileged clients, some public and private sectors of developing economies. In the universities or in the significant number of Turkish architectural journals, we are all reviewing and discussing architectural products of these intellectual exercises of the professional elite.

The profile of the architectural activity in the last decades in Turkey has focused on the following typologies:

- Building which reflect technology and global culture such as high rise office buildings, trade and business centers, shopping malls, industrial buildings which are using the international language with scant regard for regional culture, site or social context. They could be produced in any part of the world and they are relatively significant productions. Examples in the last 30 years include: Dogan Tekeli and Sami Sisa's People's Bank Building with its rationalist lines associated with symbolic expression of the form of the building derived from the company's logo. Sandor Hadi's National Reassurance Association Headquarters and shopping area, which respects the existing environment adding an outdoor space, it has a modern and expressionist aesthetic. Resit Soley's Ottoman Bank using some recent products of building industry and materials has a clear modern form and image as a significant building belonging to the above mentioned typology. Soley uses the same language in the interior and the exterior design, in the details and also in the furniture. Mehmet Konuralp's Sabah Media Centre with its pure form and using advanced technology in its details and construction also must be mentioned in the same category. Dogan Tekeli- Sami Sisa's industrial buildings, Eczacıbası medicine factory has a sterile image and architects not just solves functional and structural problems but also gives emphasis

on the form and the meaning of the building. Arolats refurbished an industrial building in Bursa being in conformity with fashionable trends not just in the form also in the elements they attached to the tectonics of the building. The quality in detailing and construction is remarkable. Avcıoğlu uses the high technology and the new materials being as transparent as possible in the office block of Aksoy factory.

- Another dominant area of architectural production of 1980's is the tourist developments and holiday villages. They are characterized by a search for an identity, a form of relation to the historical background of the country and the regional framework. They aim to introduce an image of the country to the international guests who have limited time and go only selected places. They usually refer to and make collages from the local, regional, vernacular, historicist vocabularies. Çavdar's and Birkiye's designs are some of the significant examples. Also they have been accused by designing a Disneyland of sign and symbols of different cultures, these buildings have some qualities in the synthesis of those vocabularies and refinement in detailing. Ersen Gürsel's Manastir Hotel is an attempt to interpret regional forms and expressions associated with the site and adjacent existing historic building and use some of its vocabulary.
- Housing including mass housing schemes, apartment blocks, suburban mansions and villas, summer resort houses reflects the socio-economic framework of the user groups or the investors. Mass housing schemes followed the modernist functionalism, economical and functional discourses as their themes. Examples include products at Ataköy or later Bahcesehir as Real Estate Bank developments. More formal and mannerist tendencies occurred in later periods. Some new housing schemes for medium and high income groups, reflecting the higher popular culture, produced a post modernist-historicist syntax such as Çinici's Soyak repeating in each gate of the apartments the gate of Selcuk's Hans and Turkish houses cantilevers; or Platin housing estates which is an estate for high income groups with their swimming pools and the other facilities near the city center and without limits for the cost of building and rich variety of the elements used on the surfaces of the blocks. Tayman's Maya housing development which were developed by private firms like others. This high rise and dens apartments being isolated from the surrounding buildings by their borders and controlled entrances having their shopping centers, children playgrounds, many other social facilities. Architect tries to give an identity to the compound just by coloring the facades of the buildings.

Single apartment blocks in the cities rarely have any architectural quality although there had been some interesting examples in the first half of the last century. Gokhan Avcioğlu's apartment in Göztepe reflects his design ideas that rely on the use of high technology and careful detailing. Most interesting feature of this building is not using usual balconies, but the possibility of the opening of the wide window surface sliding on a steel beam which is constructed on the surface of the block bravely and transform the all living room to a wide balcony.

In other residential developments in suburban areas and villa groups, regional rural forms associated with some local and historic vocabularies are used to create a free mosaic to meet the expectations and aesthetic values of users of high income groups as can be found in Kemer country. Some interpretations of regional forms and space values inspired by place and local environment can also be found in some resort houses such as

Ersen Gürsel's Datca Aktur houses. The layout of the houses and the scale and proportion and form of the outdoor spaces between the houses are more successful than the buildings themselves. Regional expressions and interpretations in harmony with environment using local materials and scale of buildings and outdoor spaces can also be seen in such as Demir houses in Bodrum by Turgut Cansever. Cities and districts which still preserve their homogeneous environmental character and quality like Bodrum, inspire and oblige the architects to enhance their sense of place and identity, by the help of building regulations and guides for specific areas. In that context Han Tümertekin although modernistic in approach, realized a house interpreting regional forms and expressions in Bodrum and in Assos he used natural materials such as stone and wood. The site walls are inspired by the local stone houses although the continuation of the stone surface on the roof has no significant meaning, spaciousness of small inner space by large windows at the front of the house against the valley is a courageous attempt. Resit Soley built a stone house respecting natural and local values of the rural context in Bozcaada. Specially stone walled studio with wide openings against valley and the sunset view is a small but interesting example for the interpretation of local character. House in Yalıkavak, Bodrum designed by Fuat Sahinler and Nevzat Sayın's house in Tekirdag are more contemporary comments in a specific district and area.

- Public Buildings which were designed and constructed in the beginning of Turkish republic in 30's and 40's of last century, followed German rationalist, Turkish nationalist style and later a modernistic and international styles. Whatever their style, most of these were elitist in conception and examples of significant buildings with artistic qualities supported by a cultural or political thought. Turgut Cansever's Turkish Language and History Institution although built in 60's, is an extension to such a trend and a significant example of regional architecture with a modern interpretation related to the site and city context. It has assimilated spatial and formal characters of regional architecture using partly the local material but employed modern details and lighting effects.

Gradually adopting liberal economic policies, rapid urbanization; an increase in the demand for buildings; drastic transformation of culture and invasion of popular cultural values in society affected also decision makers and the architects in public services. They resulted in standard types of public buildings with very poor architectural design and implementation quality such as school buildings and small hospitals. Attempts to produce more significant buildings by architectural competitions mostly failed, resulting in very few distinguished buildings. However one of the latest example is the Merih Karaaslan's housing scheme in Urfa where adapting the layout of the scheme to the topography and to the outdoor space characteristic of the existing environment are appreciated but copying of old building elements and the forms with the recent technology to adopt the regional context and local site can not be justified.

- University Buildings were also produced by competitions. A remarkable one is Middle East Technical University by Çinici in the near past. Although it has designed and built more than 30 years ago, each building have the lines of modern forms and materials of its time and have different identity even they were designed by the same architect. There are also some private Universities whose new campuses having architectural qualities referring to architect's approaches. Some of them are designed

by international firms, usually hybridizing modern styles with unrelated local and regional forms and in an unrelated context. The aim is to create a regional image as in many examples of colonial architecture. Koc University campus, for example has a certain precision in construction and a high quality of materials, is designed by borrowing the irrelevant vocabulary such as cantilevers imitating old Turkish wooden houses for such a different function and structure.

Recently, in the state Universities too, depending the professional interest and elitist approach of administrative bodies supported significant buildings in their campuses. Such as in Istanbul Technical University, girl's dormitory by Inceoglu which was the beginning of a new life inside the dormitories in Turkey and create a home environment which was informed by a research project done just before the design; recent student dormitories by Paker and Kahvecioglu which took the same idea further; nursery school by Aksoy and Saglamer with a specious, bright and lively interior; social center by Erkman and Sener with a great transparency between inside wall and outside landscape, earthquake research Center by Kader with the unity of material and the tectonic of the building, Taskisla roof renewal by Uraz, Aslan, Altun with its spacious, modern and lively character are some examples of new modern or technology based projects.

- Primary schools, which are financed and owned by private sectors or companies produced also some significant examples such as Nevzat Sayin's Irmak school. The unity of the design concept, structure and the material of the building makes it a distinguished one.
- Some other significant examples are a tennis club in Denizli by A.Inceoglu and D.Aslan bringing a new concept for country club. Physical training center which is constructed by local stone and wood in a linear form between Toros Mountains and the row of poplar trees with a rather contextual approach and a restaurant with more transparent spaces and industrial materials; a social center in Fenerbahce by S.Velioglu also has very transparent facade against the sea view and expression of steel construction in harmony within the building form and its elements. The back of the building facing the road is more solid but also use the same language; and Hannover Turkish Pavilion by M.Tabanlıoglu although the function of the building is to represent Turkey, it is a modern building not attempting to refer the traditional Turkish architecture by using artificial or historical forms, but simply interpreting the traditional wooden window screen in modern and minimalist way.

These examples are related to the personal preferences and approaches of the architects which has been accepted and supported by the decision-makers or financing bodies. Mutual understanding, shared cultural backgrounds, accepted or tolerated aesthetic appreciation between client and the architect influenced these works and necessarily to generate legitimate built environment.

This existing chaotic environments; immense differences and duality in the quality of lifestyles, differences in the economy and culture among social groups and people and the ratio of significant architectural products among the building stock lead us to a conclusion that architecture is becoming an intellectual hobby. This seems to be the state affair in most third world countries but this is particularly the case in Turkey.

On the other hand dynamism, capacity and ability to adopt technology and new developments, willingness to catch the contemporary lifestyle, educational and cultural level, potential of the well educated new generation are the hopes of a future Turkish Society. Also significant amount of young architects who are well informed about the developments in the world, increasing number of educated, motivated business class and bourgeois who commission significant projects, and improved formal and informal educational milieu and increasing number of professional journals and publications are healthy developments.

I hope we can also succeed in our attempt to train better architects and to inform and educate the society. I also hope that by presenting good examples of architecture in the popular media, we will be able to produce a better appreciation of architectural quality. We can give opportunity to foreign architects to design and build only to those who are producing pioneering architectural buildings as it happened in Paris and not to those who want to build 'neo-colonial' architecture. I also hope we will be able to change and improve building regulations which would affect the architectural quality positively. I also hope we can preserve our cultural diversities and its reflection on our built environment which are the diminishing qualities and colors of the world we want to preserve. Only with significant buildings, searching new solutions for problems and with creative ideas, architecture will be a respected profession enjoying a wider appreciation.

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