

## ELVAN GÖKÇE ERKMEN

Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Turkey

### GUSTAV OELSNER TOWARDS EARLY TURKISH REPUBLICAN ARCHITECTURE

**Abstract:** In 1933, The National Socialist German Workers' Party under the leadership of Adolf Hitler had won the elections. Also, in 1933, in the ten years old Republican Turkey a university reform process was the topic. This overlap in 1933 would influence the destinies of many people in both countries. Republican Turkey in which a modernization process was created with many institutions had become a second homeland for the exile professors from Germany and Austria who were dismissed by the Nazi Regime and its racist ideology. The primary architects and urban planners of the Republic such as Ernst Egli, Clemens Holzmeister, Hermann Jansen who came to Turkey in late 1920s and the names of the second wave including Bruno Taut, Martin Wagner, Martin Elseasser, Ernst Reuter and Gustav Oelsner who came to Turkey after 1933, found themselves in the tensile modernization / identification process.

In this context, Republican Turkey would benefit from architecture and urban planning as the representation tools of the revolution. The Early Republican Turkey, a nation state, that embraced a secular, modernist view is at the center of these discussions today. This Western-modernization movement which is suitable for the ideology of the revolution had influenced Turkish cultural life and the physical environment of the Turkish people. The contradiction between the old and the new in the ideology had reflected on architecture, Atatürk's Westernized, rationalist and positivist idea was represented with a modernist and industrial language in architecture.

With his role in creating a functionalist and modernist urban planning education as a lecturer, Gustav Oelsner helped raising a new generation which would be responsible of developing a technical and physical infrastructure of the Republic, while also working as a planning expert for the Ministry of Public Works.

This article aims to emphasize his sensitive approach about the cultural heritage, historical and natural values of Anatolian settlements in both his urban plans for the war-torn cities of Republic of Turkey and the articles he had written; as well as his contributions to modern urbanism in Turkey.

**Keywords:** Emigration, exile, Gustav Oelsner, haymatloz, international, national, nation state, Turkish republican architecture.

*I had seen that the shameful expansion of the scholars  
from Germany is now meaningful in a creative way.  
I had discovered a wonderful country where the Western plague had not penetrated.*

Philipp Schwartz<sup>1</sup> [Azrak 2007]

*Actually Turkey had become a second homeland for German émigré's  
like me who had spent years in this beautiful country.*

*But it did not replace the original homeland  
for a while, Turkey had become a homeland which we loved,  
knew and connected as much as our original homeland.*

Fritz Neumark<sup>2</sup> [Erichsen 1994]

### Introduction: Overlap in 1933

In 1933, The National Socialist German Workers' Party under the leadership of Adolf Hitler had won the elections. Also, in 1933, in the ten years old Republican Turkey a university reform process was the topic. This overlap in 1933 would influence the destinies of many people in both countries. Republican Turkey in which a modernization process was created with many institutions had become a second homeland for the exile professors from Germany and Austria who were dismissed by the Nazi Regime and its racist ideology. *More than two hundred exile professors were invited to Turkey with the attempts of Republican Turkey, the ambassadors of Berlin and Vienna in Turkey, the solidarity organizations* [Erichsen 1994]. Turkish government guaranteed that the professors (including the arrested ones, the ones which were in the Nazi concentration camps) who accepted the invitation would be the official officers of Turkey and would be protected by the Turkish government [Fischer-Defoy 2007]. Therefore, Republican Turkey prevented the Nazi regime to trace the exile professors. Turkey also allowed the relatives of the professors who were threatened by the Nazi regime to come to Turkey [Erichsen 1994].

Some of the architects and artists who had come to Turkey, had chosen to create a revolutionary art and architecture against the traditionalist one, hence they were forced to leave because of this choice, the other ones were forced because of the anti-Semitism. The primary architects and urban planners of the Republic such as Ernst Egli, Clemens Holzmeister, Hermann Jansen who came to Turkey in late 1920s and the names of the second wave including Bruno Taut, Martin Wagner, Martin Elseasser, Ernst Reuter and Gustav Oelsner who came to Turkey after 1933, found themselves in the tensile modernization/ identification process. The most important duty of

<sup>1</sup> Philipp Schwartz (1894-1978) founded the Advisory Office for German Scientists (NdWA) in 1933 after immigrating from Germany to Switzerland. He helped important scientists go to Turkey, and had a managery position in Istanbul University Medical Faculty for 19 years.

<sup>2</sup> Fritz Neumark (1900-1991) left Hitler's Germany in 1936, taught economics in Istanbul University between 1936 and 1952, and published books.

these intellectuals was to create a revolutionary architecture which was appropriate for the Republican ideology and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's revolutions<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Architectural representation

Spaces are the products of the previous processes and the load barrier of the current relationships. Also, a spatial building is a vehicle which led the establishment of the social relationships which were based on power. In this context, Republican Turkey would benefit from architecture and urban planning as the representation tools of the revolution. In the societies which have a remarkable cultural heritage, if the regime transforms, it gets complicated for the architects. Especially in the multi-ethnic structures such as Ottoman Empire which are combined of different languages and religions, architectural language becomes an important tool for creating an identity. Ottoman Turkish architecture has the traces of the identification struggle of the cultural life in the transition period from the emperorship to the process of being a nation state. Therefore, a harsh identification struggle has existed since the late Ottoman periods until today. Meanwhile, the contradictions between the nationalism and universalism, between being religious and secularism had reflected to architecture from the arguments – focused on traditionalism and modernism- of the political and cultural agendas [Balamir 2003]. The Early Republican Turkey, a nation state, that embraced a secular, modernist view is at the center of these discussions today. *The interpretations on this era are still the heartbeats of the identification. Thus, each political style which rises today has the necessity to deal with that era* [Tekeli 1994].

Let's take a look this improvement in the context of the architectural style briefly: The dissolution which had begun with the declarations of the independence of the nations which compose the Ottoman Empire had highlighted the regional and historical emphasis in the emperorship architecture. In the transition period, (from the emperorship to the creation of the nation state) the discussions about the identification and the anxiety of the sense of belonging were focused on the roots of the regional – iconic language and its meaning: Like the Ottoman Empire, Anatolian folk culture, moreover, the pre-Islamic period of the Turkish people and Middle Asia culture [Erkmen-Gökçe 2009] (Photo 1). The problem during the creation of the national identification of the Republic which was founded in 1923 was both to preserve the cultural identity and to be modern with the Western methods towards the new ideology. The focus of the architectural arguments was to get rid of the Islamic – Ottoman emphasis on the architectural language.

In the second half of the 1920s, after the elimination of the Ottoman elements, architects led to a Western/universal model (Photo 2). That behavior which was iso-

<sup>3</sup> These reforms included abolition of Islamic institutions, the liberation of women and were part of the revolutionary political and social programme to modernise Turkey.



Photo 1. 1908, Vedat Tek, Grand Post Office

Source: [<https://terscita.blogspot.com.tr/2013/01/postahane-i-amire.html> (10.05.2014)].

Photo. 2. 1935, Hochthief, Filteranlage

Source: [[www.goethe.de/ins/tr/ank/prj/urs/geb/ind/was/trindex.htm](http://www.goethe.de/ins/tr/ank/prj/urs/geb/ind/was/trindex.htm) (07.04.2015)].

Photo. 3. 1942-1944, Sedat Hakkı Eldem and Emin Onat, Istanbul University, Sciences and Literature Faculty

Source: [<https://v3.arkitera.com/h36225-sedad-hakki-eldem-yuz-yasinda.html> (09.03.2015)].

lated from the historical relationships had included its antithesis in itself, beginning from 1939 – after Atatürk died – when the nationalist regimes arose Turkish architects lead to a regionalist approach. The specific era is important because it contains the period in which Oelsner worked in Turkey.

In this era, the important conditions for Turkey were: Second World War (1939), the creation of an inner economy, the life with the war economy, even if Turkey did not exist in the war the reflection of the synthesis between a new populism and peasantism with the ideas of statism and nationalism on the architecture [Tekeli 1994]. So, an architectural style which was a combination of traditionalist elements and the modernist style of the Republic and a combination of the idea of the nation state and the totalitarian nationalism would influence Turkish architecture until the end of the 1940s [Özer 1964] (Photo 3).

After the establishment of the Republic in 1923, the tired but proud people who faced several wars such as Balkan Wars, World War I and the National Independence War against the imperialist powers and witnessed the demolition of their countries supported the revolutions of the national hero Mustafa Kemal Atatürk with the aim to create a secular and modern nation in a generous way. The abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924 was the most important step of the secularization. In 1924, the Islamic capital of the Ottoman Empire, would lose its role, the new capital would be Ankara, the center of the war. This Western-modernization movement which is suitable for the ideology of the revolution had influenced Turkish cultural life and the physical environment of the Turkish people. The contradiction between the old and the new in the ideology had reflected on architecture, Atatürk's Westernized, rationalist and positivist idea was represented with a modernist and industrial language in architecture. The product which was born had an ideological function which was to maintain

the modernization and social secularization in the space. Modern architecture had become a good (and the only) opportunity for the first generation which was raised by the Republican Revolutionary ideas. 1930s is the era of the construction of the new nation and its spaces. Urban planning discipline took responsibility in the context of the modernization and the civilization of the society with the spatial organization/rehabilitation in a Westernized way, the regulation of the public spaces which can be a center for any age, sex and social class.

To provide the city life and environmental habits which were in harmony with the visual culture of the republic with to create modern spaces for the people who are dedicated to the rural traditions. In fact, the people who had faced a war recently and demolished Western Anatolian cities had many necessities and urgent problems which need to be solved. Hence, in 1923 the precursor urban planning movement had been activated in burnt down, demolished Western Anatolian cities such as Izmir and Manisa. Also, local organizations which were related with the center had been planned for the rehabilitation of these regions.

## 2. University reform process

The idea of city planning and the establishment of the related institutions of the Republic had been linked with the University Reform in 1933 [Tekeli 2006]. The first reformist move was the abolishment of *Darülfünun*<sup>4</sup> and the constitution of a new, modernist university instead. The necessity of Turkish government was to have prominent professors for the educational reform. This problem was solved by the attempts of Professor Malche<sup>5</sup> and Professor Schwartz. They had recommended several names, dismissed professors who were forced to leave their homeland; Germany and Austria. These professors were invited to Turkey. So the need of the dismissed professors had become the solution of the problems and necessities of Turkey. This mutual need had turned into a vital move for sciences and education [Katoğlu 2007].

With the University Reform process, many prominent urban planners from Germany had come to Turkey. These social democrat professors were very important because they were deeply interested with the planning problems of Turkey which was an exhausted, pre-modern country a while ago in the modernization process. These professors had faced with a non-industrialized and unplanned society, they had tried to adapt to this society.

Gönül Tankut expresses that the creation of Turkish society's physical environment which is suitable for the political model of the Republic was the expected thing from the

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<sup>4</sup> *Darülfünun* professors refused to write in the Latin script. They said that they would break their pens and would not write a single word in Latin Alphabet.

<sup>5</sup> Prof. Albert Malche (1876-1956), invited by Atatürk as a counselor for the university reform in 1932.

architects and the urban planners: Anatolian city would not face any interim phase, it would jump into the modern era. So, the scene which was necessary for the transformation of the pre-modern community to a modern society would be created [Tankut 1994].

The architect and the urban planner Gustav Oelsner who came to Turkey in 1939 had analyzed the Anatolian cities, people of Anatolia, the true needs, problems, circumstances deeply, he had interpreted the roots of the tradition, he had not ignored even a small detail in urban planning, these properties of him made him privileged among his peers. The circumstances which took his homeland away from Oelsner are the same as the circumstances of the other German intellectuals. The modernist re-organization of the public areas in the Young Republican Turkey and the establishment of Turkish modernist educational system were the expectations of Turkish government from Oelsner. Oelsner used to work as an urbanism expert at the Ministry of Public Works in Ankara, Turkey. During the same period, he began his teaching career in Istanbul (*Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi*)<sup>6</sup> by giving lectures as an urban planner. In 1944, the school was transformed into Istanbul Technical University. After the transformation, Oelsner kept giving urbanism lectures. In the meantime, after the departure of Henri Prost, Oelsner (and his assistant Kemal Ahmet Aru) was invited to Academy and he had given lectures on urbanism until his departure in 1949.

### 3. Oelsner's arrival

Olaf Bartels, historian and critic for architecture expresses the reasons of the dismissal of Oelsner: *Oelsner was Jewish and he had no choice. (...) In Germany, Oelsner was City Architecture Director at Hamburg/ Altona. In 1933, he was forced to resign by Hamburg- Altona Municipality. Nazi regime sued him for malpractice. It was not a fair case and Oelsner defended himself. His contributions to the architecture of Hamburg-Altona were so remarkable that the Nazis could not ignore him. Nazi regimists showed the transformation of the political system and their power by firing the general/executive officers. In this era, Oelsner took a step back from the social life. (...) «Reichskristalnacht/Crystal Night» is the name that's been given to the night of 9-10 November 1938. In almost all German cities, that night, store windows of Jewish shops were broken, Jewish houses and apartments were destroyed, and synagogues were demolished and set on fire. Many Jews were arrested, beaten, and some were even killed. (The same night, Turkish people were praying for Atatürk who was very ill. The national chief Atatürk had passed away on the morning of 1938, November 10)<sup>7</sup>. Under these circumstances, Oelsner could not stay in Germany [Bartels 1994].*

<sup>6</sup> In order to train civil architects and engineers Hendese-i Mülkiye Mektebi was founded in 1884. Afterwards, it was renamed as Mühendis-i Ali and later it was restructured as Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi.

<sup>7</sup> Not a part of the quotation.

Bartels quotes from Oelsner's memories (1950): *In 1939, the first day of the war, I left Germany by the last plane for a long time.* Oelsner was led to young Republican Turkey by his friend; an architect and urban designer Fritz Schumacher: Between 1937 and 1939 in New York, Oelsner reconnected with the former mayor of Hamburg Max Brauer who had immigrated from Germany to USA. Brauer had suggested immigration to India. In the meantime, Schumacher had received a telegram from Robert Vorhoelzer who had been working in Turkey. In the telegram, Vorhoelzer was asking Schumacher to suggest an urban planner to work in Turkey. This telegram Oelsner received just as he was packing for India (in Oelsner's words: *the telegram which Schumacher brought with joy*) would change the future plans of Oelsner and his life. Oelsner, had kept this telegram as a precaution during his journey to the unknown [Bartels, 1994]. Thereby, with the formal invitation of the official from the ministry, Muammer Çavuşoğlu, Oelsner started working as an urbanist expert/consultant in Ministry of Public Works, in September 1st 1939, in Turkey. His posterior missions were both to teach at Istanbul Technical University (1940) and in the Academy<sup>8</sup> (1943). In 1948, approximately eight years later, for the first time, he left Turkey in June (to October) for a journey to Germany. In the same era, Brauer had become the mayor of Hamburg again and he had invited Oelsner in 1949. Oelsner accepted his invitation, he had become the consultant of the rebuilding project of Hamburg. In the meantime, he kept being a lecturer in Istanbul until 1951. Then he left Turkey and returned to Hamburg [Haymatloz 2007]. Oelsner continued the friendship with his Turkish friends until his death.

Oelsner came to Turkey for the last time as a jury member in a competition for a development plan of Ankara in April 1955. Next day, he went to Istanbul and gave a one last lecture at Istanbul Technical University. Again Prof. Aru was his translator. A few months later, Istanbul Technical University gave him an honorary doctorate. Oelsner passed away in April 1956, two days before his trip to Istanbul. Kemal Ahmet Aru<sup>9</sup> who started to work as a translator and an associate for Oelsner in 1940 expresses the facts about Oelsner: *He wanted to stay with us, he wanted to live here until his death. He had a testament; he wanted to be buried in Bursa, Turkey. He could not reject the invitation of the mayor. He said: I have to go now. It's my homeland, they need me* [Demir 2008].

Oelsner's departure from Turkey had been sad. His expressions to his student and friend Rudolf Lodders show his feelings and thoughts: *If God could make it possible, I want to live the exact same life over again* [Bartels 1994]. *Turkey era which had lasted for ten years is priceless for me. I have learned to know / understand a valuable culture from my Turkish friends, nice and elegant people. By the way, I have evaluated Germa-*

<sup>8</sup> Academy was founded in 1882 as "Mektebi Sanayi i Nefise i Şahane". It is the first arts and architecture graduate school in Turkey. The name changed into "Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi" in 1928, "Mimar Sinan Üniversitesi" in 1981, and "Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi" in December of 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Aru is an important urban planning expert and an architect. He's said to be a *reference for the global architects and urban planners* by UNESCO. He stated: *Oelsner was like a father to me, he called me son.*

*ny in many good ways and at the same time, suspicious, discussable ways and I have realized the importance of building and planning for my life [Demir 2008].*

There are only a few documents about the years of Oelsner in Turkey. Some of these documents are the contracts and the legal correspondence with the institutions that he worked in. His drawings show his views on Turkey. Oelsner did not practice architecture in Turkey. In his career in Turkey, he was interested in being a teacher, being a jury member, a consultant and research, urban planning.

#### 4. Gustav Oelsner as an urban planner

1930s is the era of the modernization of the cities. Through this modernization process, to solve the problems in the context of the functional and spatial organization, theoretical discussions and organizations such as CIAM had become prevalent. In the same era, in Turkey, the notion of urban planning and the related institutions had been newly born [Tekeli 2006]. As a result, the problems which need to be solved in Turkey and in Germany are different in an inevitable way.

The idea of city making in a planned way is out of question in Traditionalist Turkish Architecture. Most of the Anatolian cities were not planned, they had grown up in an organic way. The city had an order which was based on the privacy and introversion. In the context of this order, there were introverted houses, dead ends which link the gap between the houses and the city center but there were not any public space. This order was a showcase of Turkish – Islamic culture which was based on agricultural economy. The gathering points of the city are the cultural and the economic center of the city, mosque and the bazaar which grew up around the mosque. Public services were provided by several foundations. People had built homes and roads for themselves. It caused the development of complex planned, organic cities [Alsaç 1976].

Urban planning actions in Turkey had started with the city plans for Istanbul in 19th century, in the late Ottoman era. The economic, administrative, military and socio-cultural transformation of the Ottoman Empire during the Westernization process, between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century had reflected on architecture and urban planning at short notice. The religious identity of the traditionalist architecture had gained a mortal character. According to Gevher Gökçe Acar, this duration carries a dramatic identity and also affects the architectural repertoire of the future Republic of Turkey in its early years, while creating a previously powerful empire's last magnificent works, who was in an honorable battle of existence against the strengthening western nations [Acar 2000]. In 19th century, the population started to increase and in 20<sup>th</sup> century, accelerated industrialization had become prevalent. This caused the birth of the planned organizations which would provide the administration of the cities, beginning with Istanbul. They are precautions against the disasters such as fires, earthquakes. Starting from the beginning of the 19th century, the building regulations were tried to be systematized.



1848 Building Regulation defined rules both for street and buildings. In 1855, the first municipality in Istanbul was founded, followed by the Municipal Commission in 1856, which established norms for streets, pavements, lighting, cleaning, garbage disposal, etc. These steps prepared the urban planning discipline in Turkey. The problems of the city escalated with the increase of the population of the city. Many critics had written articles about the rehabilitation of the streets, the creation of the new squares and about the conservation of the buildings and the buildings that were demolished.

The first urban regulations of Turkish cities had been introduced during the Republican Period. After the foundation of the Republic, the establishment of the Public Works Management is one of these regulations. The initial attempt of urban planning in a Western concept in Turkey was the master / development plan for Ankara by Hermann Jansen. The year 1930 marked the introduction of a new Local Administration Act which merged municipalities and special provincial administrations. The Law of Municipalities (1930) had made the municipalities to have master plans. In 1935, urban planning department of Ministry of Public Works had been established. A year after a committee for Public Works to examine the master plans of the Municipalities had been founded. Gustav Oelsner had worked with both of these departments.

The duty of Oelsner which was defined by the Ministry of Public Works was to examine and reevaluate the approved master plans by field trips with his assistant. For this reason, he had visited many cities in Turkey. He had mentioned these trips to a friend of him, August Obenhaupt: *You can't guess how colorful my work over here is. Hundreds of master plans are being controlled and edited by me. Especially, the plans of the important cities are being designed by me. That's why I travel so much. I face a touchy hospitality everywhere but some of the trips are really hard and of course I'm not a teenager anymore. The people around me are very kind and moreover, they are very delicate, it's a property of these people* [Demir 2008].

Oelsner combined his regional observations on Turkey with his experience which he gained in Kattowitz between 1911 and 1922 as a director. He had given lectures and written articles about the Garden City Movement. Here, he evaluated Turkish villages, towns and cities, he had interpreted these urban elements in the context of Turkish culture.

## 5. Gustav Oelsner as an urban planning lecturer

Back in his homeland, in his designs, he had left traditional building methods/construction techniques, he had created new techniques and planimetric proposals which are suitable for the current needs of the era, he had included social transformation to his modern designs. His sketches and watercolor etudes which are focused on Turkey show some hints about his thoughts about the needs of the current architecture. These drawings of Oelsner exhibit a soft modern approach which preserves the traditionalist and the regionalist flavor of the country. Oel-



Fig. 1. Gustav Oelsner in Turkey Village House Etudes  
 Source: Oelsner Gustav, 1944, "Köyler", No. 11/12: 269.

sner's researches and designs (also, his publications and paintings) which focused on Turkey reflect the feeling of catching the spirit of the region (Fig. 1).

Being an architect in two different countries which have very different cultures/traditions, different economic and social conditions should have caused a hard working process in his adaptation process. Also, it should be considered that Oelsner had worked as an urban planning lecturer in two universities with the advice of the Ministry of Public Works [Demir 2008].

Urban Planning had been given as a course by Ernst Egli, Celal Esat Arseven, Martin Wagner, Henri Prost in the Academy since 1930s. According to Üstün Alsaç, the consideration of the urban planning education in both technical and social, economic and administrative ways is related with the three conferences that Martin Wagner, German urban planner had given in 1937, Ankara University: "The Role of the Capital in Urbanism", "The Role of the Machine in Urbanism", "The Role of the Organization in Urbanism". A year after these conferences, Ernst Reuter had begun his teaching career in the same institution [Alsaç 1976]. The establishment of urban planning department in Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture which was founded by Oelsner in 1944 is a huge improvement.

The oldest document about the teaching career of Oelsner in the Academy dates back to 1943, March 10. This document is a three month contract between the Director of the Academy, Burhan Toprak and Gustav Oelsner. The contract conditions are important for setting up an example for other foreign lecturers' contracts. The contract included his monthly salary, travel allowances for the official trips, accommodation fee per a day. Also it included some conditions: Oelsner would not be interested with any commercial, political, economic themes during his stay. He would take a vacation two times a year during the semesters (if he's sick, he could take a three months leave). The posterior contracts (1944, May 18th and 1945, June 27th) include the exact same notions except the monthly salary. In 1947, June 1st (extension: a year) and in 1948, May 24th (extension: six months) his stay had been extended. In 1948, June 7th, he got off from work to go to Hamburg [Demir 2008]. A document that is dated 1948, December 4th was sent to the chief of Architecture department, Arif Hikmet Holtay. The document showed that Oelsner could only give lectures in November, December, January and February because of his other duties and also Oelsner's salary expectation (800 TL) which he wished to transfer a third of the money to Germany.

Another document (1949, January 5th) was sent to Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture by the Academy. The question in the document was *can Oelsner give lectures for eight hours in a week in the Academy?* The answer to that document (1949, January 20th) was positive. As a result, a six months contract was done with him beginning in 1949, January 1st. The last document which is dated to 1949, November 25th was sent by the Director of the Academy to Ministry of National Education. In this document, the Director had expressed that they wished to extend the contract with Oelsner [Demir 2008]. Oelsner who had come back to Turkey in November 1950 (from Germany) had left Turkey for good in the spring of 1951.

Gustav Oelsner had innovative ideas about urban planning in both schools. Also, he created the idea of evaluating the problems of the cities in a realistic way [Çubuk 2012]. According to Kemal Ahmet Aru, Oelsner knew Turkey well, he was suitable for the ideals of the Turkish educators and he was the first architect that focused on the notions of the modern urban planning and led discussions about it. Turkish Historian of Architecture, Behçet Ünsal defines Oelsner whom he met at the Bureau in the Ministry of Public Works: *He's modest but self-confident. He had naïf drawings. He had included the discipline of urban planning to the Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul Technical University* [Demir 2008].

That expression of Ünsal is highly remarkable, because Ünsal, who had written harsh critics about the architects, had no tolerance against the privileges of the foreign architects. It seems that Oelsner was privileged among the others, he was respected and loved unlike some of the foreign architects and planners. This was related with some facts. Firstly, Oelsner, a social democrat knew the exact needs and the conditions of the Young Republic and secondly, he had an intimate interest towards the urban planning and the social events [Alsaç 1976].

Ernst Egli and Bruno Taut are the revolutionist actors of the educational program of the Academy. They had different approaches of urban planning. Egli asked his students to design the plans of big squares. In the meantime, Oelsner had studied little towns. Oelsner shared practical classes with the pioneer of Modern Architecture in Turkey, Seyfi Arkan, while carrying out the theoretical classes on his own. Oelsner had given lectures twice in two weeks at Istanbul Technical University. During his absence, Kemal Ahmet Aru had given lectures instead of him. Aru stated that Oelsner's lectures were really interesting: *He visits many Anatolian cities and he mentions the problems of the cities in a realistic way. He was a planner that knew the whole country, Turkey. He had embraced the cultures of the country* [Demir 2008].

A document was sent by the Academy management to Oelsner, about the failure of students. Oelsner had responded with a document to the directorate of the Academy. This document is both a defense statement and a critical text. Here, he criticized the institution, he put emphasis on the fact that the success rates of the students in Istanbul Technical University was better than the Academy. According to Oelsner, the reason was that the urban planning course was a secondary course in the Academy [Demir 2008]. Also, he

pointed out that the conditions of the school were not sufficient enough. Additionally, he had expressed his thoughts about the proficiency, urban planning: *In fact, urban planning can't be learned / studied at the universities. One should combine his/her life time experience in the proficiency with the educational approaches. Urban planning is a broad subject, aesthetic, social and economic notions should be considered and evaluated, the development of the elements of the combination should be taken into consideration. It's natural to have comprehensive knowledge of the technical issues. If one succeeds all of the above, he/she can call himself an urbanist/urban planner. That's why we can't see young urban planners in the world, for this proficiency, one needs an experience which would take years. Average random urban planning which had not been organized and planned well had influenced many Anatolian cities in a very bad way. I have been invited by the ministry to provide a harmony in urban planning with the thought of the foundation of the urban planning department in the universities which would be useful for the Ministry to develop suitable and realistic master plans. I have thought that the harmony was complete when I began my teaching career at the Academy. Only the approach of urban planning which is based on the reality and the needs – possibilities is correct. If one prefers a formalist urban planning approach which doesn't focus on economic and social bases, it would hamper my work in Ankara. There are a lot of formalist master plans in the country, now we have to work hard to transform these [Demir 2008].*

## 6. Articles

Oelsner had written fourteen articles to the most important (and the only) architectural magazine of the era. In the contemporary world, his articles may seem old fashioned but these should be evaluated in the specific era. The articles were important because they focused on the cities, villages and towns of the rural of the country which had faced a really big war and which did not have sufficient technology, economy and cultural circumstances. The problems in the demolished villages of the Young Republican Turkey in the postwar period are very different than the problems of the Western world. In the articles, Oelsner put emphasis on the health issues of the old towns of Turkey, he had warned the municipalities about the rehabilitation of these towns and he had invited his colleagues to check the municipalities especially about the rehabilitation of the old houses against the diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. Another problem of the country was the several earthquakes that the country faced.

Therefore, as a witness of the earthquakes of Adapazarı, Dikili, Erzincan and Tokat, Oelsner had worked on the fields of earthquakes. He had done some research about the healthy settlements, healthy grounds, durable materials and constructions and he had prepared reports about this research. Dikili and Adapazarı plans were ecologically and socially valuable and contemporary. He reserved the large areas beyond the city for little gardens with 3x3 houses, referred to *Schreber Garten*. Oelsner's goal

was (in his own words) *to calm down the people who had faced a disaster and provide the inner peace of having a shelter.*

Oelsner acted very carefully about the notions like the ground and the underground. He had put emphasis on the facts that should be considered for the establishment of a new city; the importance of using the positive ways of the sun and the wind, the pollution of the voice and the light, the prevention from industrial smoke and dust (and the methods of prevention), the correct evaluation of the soil, the problem of the ground water and not to challenge with the conditions in unsuitable circumstances. He had never neglected the architectural part of the urbanism. He had separated the city to the zones. This approach of him was very functionalist. He had focused on the notions such as the preservation of the tradition, the rehabilitation of the old towns in a careful way. He put emphasis on his priorities about urban planning in an article of himself, "Urbanism": *There are three sacred things: Bread, Road, Home. (...) The biggest right belongs to the pedestrian, then nature, thirdly, natural and architectural heritage* [Oelsner 1945].

According to the architect, the restoration or renovation of the dynamic public areas of the Ottoman-Turkish tradition; bazaar, coffee house, Turkish bath, fountain is one of the necessities of the city to preserve its vividness [Oelsner 1946: 5-6]. He highlighted some notions such as the preservation of the historical legacy, especially a controlled landscape design which would not cause any harm to the monumental buildings and squares that have a spiritual value. According to him, any plain natural area, even a field crop is as valuable as a park or a coast [Oelsner, 1945: 3-4]. In an article of him, he expressed his thoughts about the preservation of the "old" of the historical buildings: *These buildings whether made with metal or stone should preserve the rusted layer. They are the reflections, photos of the time* [Oelsner 1943: 9-10]. *If the architect/restorer's trials cause the artwork to lose the traces of the time, his/her attempts would be useless. The noble rust layer, the patina, the dark color of the stone gives the artwork its nobility. The old one which represents a high/important culture would be preserved. Current city would be repaired. New neighborhoods can be combined with the old city but the heartbeat of the city should be in its exact same spot. It is in its strongest version at this spot. Occasionally, new cities would be created in the country. After an earthquake or after the malaria epidemic in Van, the city should be rehabilitated, created from the beginning. For these circumstances, I recommend "Siedlungs"* [Oelsner 1946]. This house type (row house) was proposed because it's more economic, durable, sheltered for the climate of Anatolia (hot summers, cold, windy winters). These houses should have small windows and small rooms. According to the architect, the biggest room of the house was the garden. Beyond the cities and the towns, there should be a green zone around the city. Following the zone, there would be row houses and a dirt road that should be covered by trees which would be bridged to the city center for the pedestrians.

Oelsner had underlined another subject, scale factor, also, the anti-aesthetic notions such as enormously wide roads, unnecessary boulevards and unnatural elements of landscape design instead of using natural elements in an aesthetic way. Oelsner's

article which was focused on the monumentality is still valid for Turkey: *Greatness is not a must of the monumentality, it's only a way. Monumentality is related with the material and the order. A little square with a sole old tree or a modest fountain of the town that we were born in are like this. Or a Polish tradition that we can face a similar one in Turkey: If the people want to respect their ancestors, they create a soil hill upon their graces. Kościuszko Mound near Krakov is one of the precedents of this tradition. Despite the mortal soil, the great idea of survival in it still stands with its honor like the granite Egyptian Pyramids. (...) See, the eroded, metamorphic t shapes of the Anatolian mountains make monumental expressions in the human beings* [Oelsner 1945].

## 7. City plans

The showcases of Oelsner's opinions about urbanism which are the master plans of Kayseri and Isparta are the unique precedents of the Republican city/settlement schema<sup>10</sup>. The common character trait of the Republican cities (including Ankara) is the usual organization which reflects the idealization of the Republican Turkey: A clear axe between the government district and the station. Both sides of the axe are covered with trees. The axe is a sample of a modern boulevard. Around the boulevard, there are representative buildings and a square near the government district. This schema in both cities, Kayseri and Isparta which were important in the context of the history of urbanism in Turkey had been preserved by Oelsner and Aru. Oelsner's main principle was the preservation of the current nature and the current pattern. In the context of the rehabilitation of the old neighborhoods, traditional housing zones and the streets, the goals were the preservation of the local character of the region, the functionalist separation of the zones, the development of a green zone around the city and the central and the suburban roads. In both plans, the future development areas were taken into consideration. For the future neighborhoods, the plan was to organize row houses within gardens (like *Siedlungs*) and also, out of the center (but related with the center) commercial zones were organized.

## Conclusion

Would Oelsner who is known for his reformist identity, practice architecture if he had been in Turkey between the late twenties and thirties, when a universal and

<sup>10</sup> For Isparta city plan: ÇETİN, Sıdıka, 2012, Geç Osmanlı'dan Erken Cumhuriyete İç Batı Anadolu'da Kentsel Yapının Değişimi: Manisa, Afyon, Burdur ve Isparta Kentleri Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir İnceleme, [jfa.arch.metu.edu.tr/cilt29/sayi\\_2](http://jfa.arch.metu.edu.tr/cilt29/sayi_2). For Kayseri city plan: 2014, ÇALIŞIR HOVAR-DAOĞLU, Seda, Kayseri Oelsner – Aru Planı ve Plan Uygulama Sürecinde Yerel Yönetimlerin Rolü (1930-1965), [www.todaie.edu.tr](http://www.todaie.edu.tr).

modernist approach was taken in the country? Or would he continue the modern approach from his country, or adapt to the new architectural field defended a nationalist regionalism, if he had practice architecture during his stay in Turkey? Questions like these are bound to remain unanswered.

The articles of Oelsner give hints about his potential resistance against to any formalist approach in the fields of architecture and urban design. In his sketches and drawings, we see that he had reflected the local pattern and the spirit of the space in a mild, soft, modernist way. This approach is suitable for the attitude of the Turkish Architecture of the specific era that transforms the modern to the nationalist but we should put emphasis on the fact that none of his drawings have a nationalist, totalitarian style which was valid for the specific era.

It should be kept in mind that majority of the cities that needed a re-organization had Ottoman special organizations. After solving the problems of the basic needs of the cities which had a damaged city pattern and the infrastructural problems, the establishment of the city life was necessary. Oelsner wanted to transform these old cities to the cities with modern and functionalist urban principles. For this transformation, he built the physical environment while valuing the rural needs and creating solutions for the cities. He had encouraged his students to explore Anatolia and also, he helped them to find jobs and study abroad. According to Rifat Akbulut, the urbanist approach of Oelsner which didn't ignore the architectural and aesthetical ways, was based on the scientific analytical studies. Akbulut expresses that Oelsner had a functionalist and a modern role in Turkey in urban planning. With this role, he had helped raising a new generation which would be responsible of developing a technical and physical infrastructure of the Republic.

*Among the German architects and the planners who work in Turkey as teachers and professionals, Oelsner is a sensitive expert about the preservation of the culture of settlement and the heritage of Anatolia with the historical and natural values [Akbulut 2012].*

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