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TOWN PLANNING FROM PARIS TO İSTANBUL: HENRI PROST AND HIS APPROACH

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Abstract

In early 20th century, the institutionalisation of town planning criteria was started with modern concerns. In Paris, Societe Française des Urbanistes formed the first bases of these criteria as a discipline. As one of the leading figures, Henri Prost contributed to the process by developing town plans first for French colonial cities in Nord Africa, then Paris and İstanbul. The paper thus analyses his planning criteria in Istanbul by comparing his previous experiences from Paris to İstanbul.

Keywords

Urbanisation; Modernism; Henri Prost

Introduction

Post period of Industrial Revolution and French Revolution brought the needs of new town planning approach and simultaneously a new order of society. When French elites founded *Musée Social* in 1894, the main aim was to create a non-governmental institution to study social and economic problems. They conducted a series of research studies on town planning, social housing, and labor organization [Elwitt 1980]. Members of *Musée Social* contributed to these studies by being in a search of 'modern' orders to response the needs of the period and to control the urban growth as well as to develop the society [Horne 2002, 4].

First years of 20th century brought the first institutionalization of urbanism as a new discipline in France. In 1911, *Société Française des Architectes Urbanistes* was established by the initiatives of a group of *Musee Social* members. Ten years later of the establishment, the group was renamed as *Société Française Urbanistes* (SFU) which is the denomination that still known today. Founder members of SFU were consisted by architects (Donat Alfred Agache, Marcel Auburtin, André Bérard, Eugène Hénard, Léon Jaussely, Albert Parenty, Henri Prost) and landscape architects (Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier, Edouard Redont) [SFU]. They together laid the foundations of French urbanism as a new discipline combining the aesthetic concerns with scientific data. However, due to the political conditions of the period, the founders could not have the possibility to execute their newly formed theories to their country [Wright 1991]. Therefore, French colonial cities represented perfect areas for them [Calabi 2000].

Among the leading founder members of SFU, Henri Prost played the significant role for the colonial territories. In 1913, he was invited for the contribution to the planning service of Morocco by the Protectorate Lyautey. A year later, in 1914, he prepared the first colonial urban plan which was for Casablanca. Following years, he continued to serve as *Directeur des Services d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme au Maroc*, and to produce plans for other North African colonial cities such as Rabat, Fes, Meknes, and Algeria. The main aim of his colonial urbanism approach was to modernize the historic cities based on the urbanism principals as formed by SFU criteria [Cohen, Eleb 2003]. Besides, his stay in Morocco would be conceived as a part of laboratory of testing the innovative ideas on heritage and urbanism, as well as their institutionalization frameworks developed in France. After his period in North Africa, in 1932 Henri Prost was charged with the *Le plan d'aménagement de la région parisienne* (PARP). In the meantime, his reputation engaged the attention of the newly founded Turkish Republican Government. In 1933, he was invited to participate in the international urban-plan competition for future planning of Istanbul. Even he had to refuse due to the continues PARP studies, three years later the Turkish Government resend the invitation. Soon after that, in 1936, Prost was charged to conduct the planning of Istanbul's Masterplan, and lead the urban department of the city until the 1951. In fact, Istanbul was already a familiar city for Henri Prost's carrier, and it was not his first time in this historic city. During his carrier as an architect, he won the prize of *Grand Prix d'Architecture* edition 1902, and the prize granted him a five-year stay of resident architect at Villa Medicis which is *Academie de France* in Rome. Within this period, in 1905, he visited Turkey for the first time. He studied and developed a research mainly for the historic part of Istanbul. In particular he focused the restoration criteria and on-site surveys of Hagia Sophia and its surroundings [Pinon 2010]. All these opportunities have underlied the background of his İstanbul knowledge. After almost thirty years of his first visit, he came back as the chef of the new devoted department of Planning Office of the city. On the one hand, his existing background for this city helped to develop his approach. On the other hand, the experiences of North Africa and Paris by the modern French urbanism orders supported his carrier, and enriched the dynamics of his final work, İstanbul Plan.

Urbanism approach discourses through theory

The first French law for the town planning, *Cornudet Loi,* was introduced in 1919. This law adopted in the post-WWI period, and indicates the necessity of an urgent preparation of a masterplan for each city which has more than ten thousand habitants. The principal aims of the law were to regulate growth and to determine the location and character of all open spaces (public parks, gardens, and squares) as well as of monuments and public buildings [Houtecoeur 1960]. Meanwhile, Prost's influence diminished for the North African urban decisions. However, he started to contribute worldwide urbanism discourses by participating in conferences and working for other cities such as Var in France, İzmir in Turkey. Later he started to work with *Comité Supérieur de l'Aménagement et de l'Organisation Générale de la Région Parisienne* (CSAOGRP) for PARP with Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier. During that time, there was a deep debate between the

SFU members about the pros and cons results of 1919 legislation. Among these debates, strong objections were directed to insufficiency of law contents [Vacher 2015].
In 1927, Prost organized overall his theory and critics by a publication titled *L'urbanisme* that he collaborated with *Directeur au Ministère de L'intérieur* Gaston Monsarrat. He started his statement as «*Il ne semble pas que cette loi ait produit les résultats désirables*» and continued by asking the reasons «*Pourquoi? Ç'est ce que nous nous proposons d'examiner*». As mentioned above by his own words, he defined the problem strongly expressed his opinion by arguing "not desirable" results of the 1919 Law [Prost, Monsarrat 1927, 2]. In addition, he continued to set the bases of his approach smoothly revising the principals of *Cornudet Loi*. Besides, he underlined the need the revision of the current laws, especially after the 'test' of French legislation in Morocco.
He defined the «zoning theory» dividing the categories as industrial zone, commercial zone, and residential zone [Prost, Monsarrat 1927, 3]. Actually, these categories were similar to previous urbanism approach in Morocco. For instance, as a friend and colleague of Prost, architect Alpert Laprade mentioned that factories, commercial buildings, and houses settled a mixed-use in the French colonies by supporting both economic facilities and hygiene conditions [Wright 1991, 107]. In the meantime, during the preparation of Plan Paris with CSAOGRP members, a conference was held in Paris as *Congrès international de l'urbanisme aux colonies Et Dans Les Pays Tropicaux* in 1931. The main topic of the conference was the explanation and presentation of the colonial urbanism approach with social and economic dynamics. Prost played an important role as the president of the congress, and he presented the principals of colonial urbanism. According to his speech, he resumed the milestones of the colonial urbanism approaches as the conception of housing, hygiene, aesthetics, protection, and conservation of the historic landscape and monuments. Besides, among these principals, the collaboration between the French modernist and local experts had significant importance [Prost 1932, 21].
In 1932 Prost was charged as the chief urbanist for the PARP, and two years later defined principals revised by Committee constituted a new law. Accompanying the law, he also submitted the masterplan. Principals of the plan represented a hierarchy between municipality and agglomeration for the road network, infrastructure, and places of green spaces [Calabi 2000]. In addition, the "zoning" approach was again visible[1].

Traces of Prost's previous works on Istanbul Plan

When Prost invited for the İstanbul Plan, the conditions of Turkey were different from French-speaking countries that he had experienced. This time, the modernization process through town planning was not related to colonialism dynamics as in North Africa neither the development of an extension plan as in Paris. His invitation to Turkey was almost 10 years after the collapsed Ottoman Empire in 1923 and the foundation of the

[1] İstanbul. Archive of Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes. Les transformation d'Istanbul III: Plans directeurs. Fond Prost, Obs Urb 0586 III.

Turkish Republic. The country was in the process of modernization within the post-WWI period that includes a series of changes on its social and political structure by replacement of Ottoman traditions with secular values [Bozdoğan 2002].
After deep analyses done by Prost and his team, he decided that İstanbul Plan should not be an Urban Development Plan as it is in Paris, but it should be an Urban Concentration Plan [Bilsel 2010]. Followingly, he started to work and prepared a masterplan and partially urban plans for the city.
However, it was still possible to follow the traces of his previous works. He defined three principal issues for the Istanbul Plan as transportation, hygiene, aesthetics. In fact, these principals were quite different from the three main principals that he defined in 1927. In accordance with the definition of urbanism by SFU members as a synthesis of aesthetic concerns with scientific data, in the introduction of *L'urbanisme*, Prost emphasized the importance of hygiene, economic and social aspects [Prost, Monsarrat 1927, 1]. The radical difference shown in Istanbul program was related the transportation concerns. Even this issue was always visible into the dynamics of his previous experiences, within the İstanbul approach the transportation gained the equal importance with the same level as hygiene and aesthetics. In fact, he explained the situation by comparing his approach in Paris and İstanbul as

> The Prost Plan, adopted in Paris, provides transportation for 6 million people with automobiles. The plan that I am proposing for İstanbul is more modern. Because, according to this plan, the city itself will be networked with motorways [Prost 1937].

Prost presented his İstanbul approach in *Academie des Beaux-arts de Paris* where he was the president of the period. During his conference titled *Les transformation d'İstanbul*, he summarized his approach as

> *Cette ville vit d'une activité prodigieuse – réaliser de grandes circulations, sans nuire à l'essor commercial et industriel, sans enrayer la construction de nouvelles habitations, est une nécessité impérieuse, d'ordre économique et social; mais conserver et protéger l'incomparable paysage, dominé par de glorieux édifices, est une autre nécessité aussi impérieuse*[2].

As it can be understood from his words, he impressed on the importance of the creation of main axes of circulation without hindering commercial and industrial development and without stopping the construction of new dwellings was an imperious economic and social need. He also emphasized the conservation of the unrivaled silhouette dominated by magnificent monuments was another necessity as imperious as the former.
The first plan finished in 1937 for the European Side separated as Historic Part and Galata-Pera Part. Meanwhile, he submitted a report including a series of principals that he proposed to urban implementations. In his report, he brought "zoning" definitions to the Istanbul Plan [Prost 1937]. Even his commercial and residential zone decisions were

[2] https://expositions-virtuelles.citedelarchitecture.fr/prost/02-CHAPITRE-02.html [September 2020].

appropriate with the city as Istanbul, the decision of the industrial zone created objections [Gül 2015]. Although in 1927 he defined the criteria as the industrial zone should be far away from the city center in order to not to create noise for inhabitants and to follow the hygiene conditions, he has chosen the Golden Hore shores in İstanbul. It is arguable that he took into consideration the existing Ottoman industrial buildings on the shore and proposed the restoration and reuse of them. Besides, Prost had the awareness of limited funds of the Turkish Republic in the after-war period. Therefore, the decision about the industrial zone could be affected by the economic conditions of the country.

In addition, within Istanbul masterplan program he adopted the expropriation order that he developed his urbanism program as well as proposed for PARP. Accordingly, he clarified the methods "expropriation" and "consolidation" as the tools of the implementation of the plan and it was proposing the organization called "property owners associations". This organization was a legal framework that would allow property owners to consolidate and reassemble in the renewal areas. Similar to Paris process, he submitted a proposal for an urban law in order to make possible the execution of masterplan. The aim was to prevent property owners from being damaged by the expropriation approach as well as to make the expropriations required by the plan possible. The law would allow the arrangements to the expropriation of 'unhealthy structures' and defination of 'building heights'. Prost was aware that his proposal was not suitable with the current laws in Turkey, but he also underlined that he prepared this proposal based on his own planning experiences [Bilsel 2010] Actually, this law was overall of his previous experiences by the rehabilitation of 'unhealthy structures' in North Africa and the definition of 'building heights' in Paris. Besides, as in the North Africa cases, he put importance to collaborate with local experts. Accordingly, he formed his team by French and Turkish architects. However, the proposal of the law has not been taken into consideration by the Turkish authorities, and therefore the plan cannot be implemented as required.

Although his İstanbul Plan partially realized, during his stay in Turkey until 1950, he developed the knowledge of modern urbanism by adopting to İstanbul. After his service, the implementations have caused damages to the fragile historical environment. However, despite these fragmentations, the city is still representing the traces of entity of his legacy [Bolca, Tamborrino, Rinaudo 2018].

Conclusions

The first period of the 20th century marked the formation of first principals of modern urbanism. Prost played an important role within the process of formation, testing, revision, and implementation as well as the institutionalization of the criteria. İstanbul Plan as the last plan of his carrier would be perceived as the projection of his urbanism approach developed over the years starting from Paris. The traces of principal urbanism orders based on the revision of *Cornudet Loi,* developed and published as *l'urbanisme principals,* and finally revealed with *Le programme du plan directeur* of İstanbul. Besides, the fundamental combination of modernism with the aesthetic approach and social integrity with humanist values was another dynamic based on the *Musée Social* doctrine.

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