

From Industrial Site to University Campus. Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory

By Burak Asiliskendr¹

Even though Turkish Modernization in the 20th century was explained as a political revolution, it dealt much more with the transformation of space and social identity. As a result, the Turkish State built several industrial sites in Anatolian cities to strengthen their urban and social development.

The Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory was the first industrial site, built like its Western models, by the Turkish Government under the aim of Modernization. It was built in 1935 near the existing

urban forms to create a change and provide development with its Avant-garde context. Ivan Nikolaev, a well-known Russian architect, designed this complex in Moscow. Actually, two contradictions

on Sümerbank Settlement that settled up to install Modern attitudes were remarkable. One of them was the support to acquire a Western (European) outlook from the Soviet Union, which was managed in a socialist manner. It could be easily read from the settlement that there was a socialist manner on both its space organizations and its management. The settlement qualified as a metropolis with its utilities consisting in managing, dwelling, entertaining or training activities that were controlled and supervised by the authority. The other contradiction was the constructivist approach of the Soviet Union at that period, which had a major role on the designing process of some buildings in the settlement. Some examples would be the operating building, the powerhouse, the main entrance or the *ateliers* or the repair house. These buildings could be evaluated as significant signs of Soviet constructivism buildings, whereas their appearance had a machinery outlook, which was formed under the idea of the "Modern" (Western) architectural context.

From a critical point of view, it could easily be evaluated that the Sümerbank industrial site was not only founded for economical development, but also constructed with an ideological point of view to transform the social order and spatial form, especially with the comfort conditions, as a reconstruction project. Sümerbank illustrated the essence of Modern life in the city of Kayseri, as an architectural symbol. The settlement consisted of many different types of buildings, each of which could be identified as an icon with its architectural context. Hence, especially the residences were the most effective elements for the re-constructing practice of the social and the urban order. As an effect of the Sümerbank, Kayseri re-ordered its urban form and architectural outlook.

In 1996, the Turkish State decided to end the industrial activities of the state-based factories, according to the national economic development planning. As an effect of that, Sümerbank Kayseri Factory was shutdown in 1999, and has been left abandoned inside the city. Site was registered as national cultural property by the Kayseri Regional Committee on the Conservation of Cultural Property due to the application of Docomomo Turkey in 2003. There were several cancellation trails on its historic monument registration to demolish some parts of the site. Moreover, some parts of the buildings were demolished. Original furniture and the operating machines were lost. In 2012, Abdullah Gül University intended to transfer the site to a university campus, aware of its historical importance.

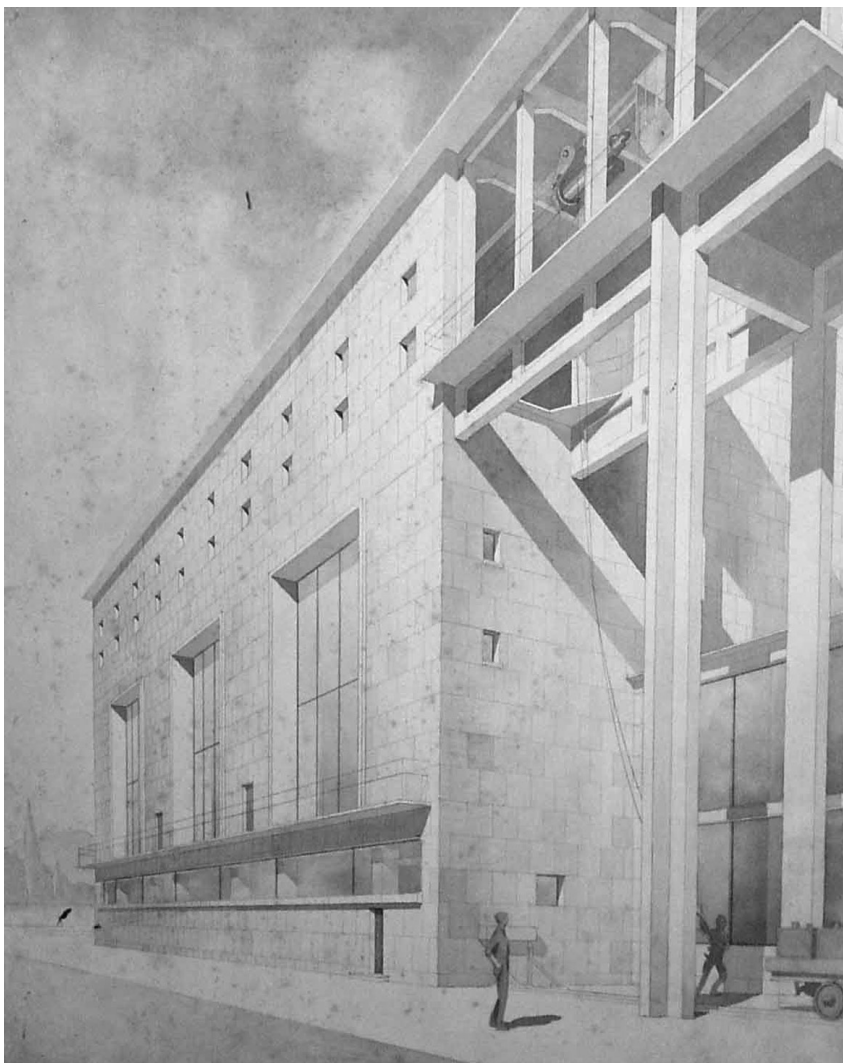


Figure 1. Original hand drawing Perspective view of the Power House.



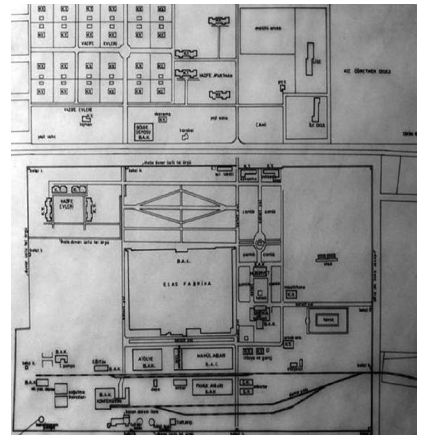
2



3



4



5



6

Figure 2. Sümerbank Kayseri Settlement, 1935.

Figure 3. Inside the Operation Building, 2013.

Figure 4. Operation Building of the Sümerbank Kayseri.

Figure 5. Site plan of Sümerbank Kayseri.

Figure 6. Power House, 2011.

Sümerbank Kayseri Factory as a Modern Agent

Turkish State encouraged the private entrepreneurs to constitute industrial sites during the first decade of the Turkish Republic. However, as an effect of the economic crisis of the 1930s, economic growth decreased and profits both for inhabitants and entrepreneurs were reduced as the acceleration of economic growth that was related with the private sector was inadequate for the desired development. For that reason, the government searched for new solutions for economic growth and modernization. They mentioned to control the industrialization process, which was constituted as one of the major needs of modernization. Therefore,

a state based mechanism in industrialization was shaped between 1931 and 1932 and it became true in 1933 (Boratav, 1989).

Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory was founded to produce cotton fabric. It was the first state-based organization in Turkey. The factory was founded in an un-inhabited area of the city centre in 1935. The settlement was designed by Ivan Nikolaev from Moscow at the Turkstroj Company, founded with Turkish and Russian funds to develop industrial sites in Turkey in the 1930s (Asiliskender, 2002).

The factory was constructed by Russian funds and labour. Turkish Government used a credit of 8.5 million Turkish Liras from the Soviet Union to establish the Factory. Its foundations were set on May

20, 1934. After its 16-month construction process, the enterprise started its service on September 16, 1935. There was a population of 155 officials and 2100 workers in the first years, while Kayseri had 46.000 inhabitants.

The buildings were the first examples of the concrete and steel framed structures in Kayseri. The site consisted in the operation building, the administration building, the power house, the repair houses and some public places such as the infirmary, schools, cinema, and some semi-public ones for workers and their families (tennis courts, swimming pools, clubs...etc.) and residences.

All of the buildings and urban plans of the Sümerbank Kayseri Settlement were shaped from plain



Figure 7. AGU Summer Campus Site Plan.



Figure 8. Inside view of the Warehouse.

88

and basic forms similar to the pioneer ones. It could be easily comprehended that these buildings had an Avant-garde outlook and were designed within a Modern context. They were unique examples of Russian Constructivism. Besides their new form, they were constructed in very new ways for the time being. Therefore, the factory with all its units created a change in Kayseri and the whole country.

Re-defining Kayseri as a Modern City

Kayseri, one of the leading metropolises of Turkey, is the city where this state-based approach was firstly put in practice, because of its strategic location and city-culture that had a leading role in its milieu. Kayseri is one of the oldest trade cities in Anatolia and at that time it had a nearly 6000 year fundamental historical background. As it had been the capital of the Cappadocia before, it was

selected as a capital city nominee for the foundation process of Turkey.

As the first state-based industrial site, the Sümerbank Textile Factory affected the social, cultural and spatial order of the city. It was not only an industrial facility, but it also led a conceptual transformation of space and society throughout its Modern concept and outlook. (Asiliskender, 2005)

One of the lucid features of establishments such as Sümerbank, is that they constituted a new local-market for the whole country by manufacturing daily and main consumption goods. Besides this native economic effect, these companies collected a great deal of workers from both the city and the whole country as a major industrial occupation zone. Therefore, it had social and spatial effects on the city with a rapid population growth. This was one of the desired improvements of the "Modern" Turkish Government that was linked with its city pol-

icies; cities were founded under the "Modern" idea of social and economic aspects to achieve a contemporary perspective.

A Modern city could be evaluated as a center; "a network or a phenomenon" that had attractive attitudes on the transportation and communication activities of it or its reactions (Deleuze, Guattari and Massumi, 1987). From this point of view, the city of Kayseri was re-identified as a center; "a network" of trade systems of the "Modern" state by founding these establishments, which had a great role in the revitalization progress of city and state economy.

In Kayseri, the Sümerbank Textile Factory also re-constructed the urban space and social order. It identified the place and its individuals definitely, in spite of the lack of progress of the Modernizing practice. Actually, it was extremely remarkable that an industrial complex and its residences re-created and defined its milieu: the sites were perceived as homes by the workers and their families, with the residences, social spaces and "cooperative settlements" more than as a working complex or an office building. The residences and the social spaces such as schools, trade centers, cinemas or sport centers converted the attitudes of its inhabitants and also people from the city, and upgraded their living habits and rituals under the ideology of 'Modern' thought (Asiliskender, 2008).

Re-defining Sümerbank as a University Campus

In 1996, the Turkish State decided to resign from the industrial activity according to the national economic development plan. The Sümerbank Kay-

seri Textile Factory lost its function due to this decision and stopped its service in 1999. As it was the first industrial site of Turkey, its ownership was transferred to Erciyes University. The place was registered as a cultural site by the Ministry of Culture Conservation Committee of Kayseri due to the application of **docomomo** Turkey in 2003. Unfortunately, the university did not intend to use the site and its buildings and there were several trail cancelations to register this historic monument which allowed the demolition of some parts of the site.

The site survived with the assistance of volunteers: there were several national and international petition campaigns to make awareness of its importance, and to create a public sense to prevent its demolition. There were several paper and poster presentations in national and international **docomomo** events. The site was questioned in a national workshop, *Understanding Modernity from Early Republican Heritage*,² held by the UIA Chamber of Architects in Turkey Kayseri Branch in 2008 and numerous ideas were developed for its re-use. Moreover, the site was issued in photography exhibitions like, *Kayserimodern*³ based on Modern heritage of the city, or some art-installations⁴ in Istanbul, Paris, etc. There were several evaluations and critics of the site and its effects in Kayseri, in the book *20th Century of the Kayseri*,⁵ published in 2012.

Nonetheless, several parts of the site were demolished: the power house was modified to become a garment-fabrication *atelier* in the 1980s, and the original machines that produced electricity from coil, were mostly dismantled. However, this change did not affect the overall planning, and the original architectural concept has been conserved.

In 2003, just after the registration process as a cultural site, Bachelors' Apartment, a significant part of the residential units, was adapted to a youth centre by the Metropolitan Municipality of Kayseri based on a special agreement with the Erciyes University. Unfortunately, the spatial form of the building was destroyed. The university also intended to modify some parts of the operation building, in a unique rectangular plan of 30.000m² (232mx132m), to make *ateliers*, classrooms and office rooms. While this renovation process was interrupted from the Ministry of the Culture Conservation Committee, the spatial form of the building and the original machines were badly damaged.

Erciyes University left the site and gave the forest area at the back side to the Metropolitan Municipality through an exceptional agreement based on fostering a new high-rise residential zone in 2007. Besides that, the university also allowed the use of

some residences from the units to the Police Headquarters of Kayseri. Four residential apartments for workers, in a unique plan type, were demolished, and some parts of the residences for officials were also damaged. Furthermore, there were also several proposals to transform the site, such as to use it as a recreation area or an exhibition hall, but all of them ran into national and international petitions.

In 2012, Abdullah Gül University, a newly founded public university in the city, took its ownership with the intention to transform the Sümerbank Site into a university campus, with the aim to not alienate the existing buildings by regarding them un-touchable nor to over-intervene and damage their existing character.

The main idea of the transformation was to create an open-city campus to generate a new impact for the urban and social development of the Kayseri city, as had happened before when the factory was initialized. Sümer will be a secondary campus for AGU. The main campus outside the city centre is also in its construction process. AGU intended the use the Sümer Campus as a cultural and activity centre, as the interaction midpoint between the city and its citizens. It will be full of cultural and intellectual activity to invent a creativity impression sensing its historical background. As a gated complex in the centre, it should provide the adequate spaces and activities that Kayseri has been lacking for long time.

Whereas there were several spaces to transform in order to use them for educational and administrative activities of the university, a new building was added to the site to point out the significance of the site. Nonetheless, the idea consisted in not only a brand-new building, but also a transfiguration process of the old warehouses. EAA, as the chief architect of this idea, proposed to convert the small warehouse with a new building addition, into a facility that will house the activities of the university. According to this idea, the roof of the warehouse was removed and a new structure for new spaces above it was added. Besides, EAA used existing arcades of the large warehouse as a generative element, and constructed a new addition above the small one, and formed an arcade view in front, mirroring the other warehouse. The idea of this renovation project was awarded in the World Architecture Festival 2012, in Singapore.

AGU School of Architecture is in the process of updating the site master plan with a heritage management plan, which would provide appropriate reuse of the building stock. All of the buildings in the AGU Sümer Campus will be renovated one by one in contemporary architectural approaches sensing its historic background and significance.

Conclusion

It is hard to create a general public opinion for the conservation of Modern and industrial heritage such as the Sümerbank Site. On account of this, the AGU Sümer Campus renovation is a unique example on handling Modern heritage. While there were numerous troubles and difficulties, damages and demolitions, the site survives with its unique characteristics. On the other hand, there has been a sense of belonging resulting from the former workers and their families, which was the key protection component. While the preservation arguments or registration process was based on the idea that the Sümerbank Kayseri Settlement was a significant masterpieces of the Turkish modernization process, the key issue has been the idea of belonging, which has been encouraged by the volunteers' assistance. This leading attempt on managing change could be comprehended as a milestone on the conservation of Modern and industrial heritage in Turkey.

Notes

1. Burak Asiliskender (Architect, MSc, PhD) is an Associate Professor at Abdullah Gül University, and the head of the Department of Architecture. He is also one of the co-founders of Argeus Architects in Kayseri. He has been one of the international members of the **docomomo**. He has several papers, articles on Modernity, identity, space and place concepts, modernization and especially spatial reflections on Turkey and Kayseri at early times of the Turkish Republic, published national and international wide.
2. *Understanding Modernity from Early Republican Heritage*, Seminar and Workshop, UIA Chamber of Architects in Turkey Kayseri Branch, October, 6-10, 2008. Kayseri.
3. *Kayserimodern*, Photography Exhibition on Modern Heritage in the Kayseri, October, 6-10, 2008, in UIA Chamber of Architects in Turkey Kayseri Branch, Kayseri.
4. There have been several exhibitions and art-installations held by Ahmet Albayrak, in Paris, Kayseri and Istanbul.
5. *20th Century of the Kayseri* was published by AGU in 2012. (Asiliskender, B., Ceylan, B. ve Tozoglu, A.E. (ed.), 2012. "Kayseri'nin Yirminci Yüzyili: Mimarlık, Kent Tarihi ve Kulturu", Abdullah Gül Üniversitesi, Kayseri.)

References

- Asiliskender, B., 2002. *Developing 'Modern' Identity On Architecture At The Early Years Of Turkish Republic: A Case Study Of Sümerbank Kayseri Cotton Factory*, Master Thesis, ITU, Istanbul.
- Asiliskender, B. 2005. *Installing 'Modern' Life Style with Architecture*, in DC Papelas, Revista Semestral de Critica Arquitectonica, Departament de Composicio Arquitectonica, v.13&14, pp.216-223, October, UPC (*Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya*), Barcelona.
- Asiliskender, B. 2008. *Modernity and Housing: Spatial and Social Change in Kayseri by Industrial Enterprises of Turkish Republic*, PhD Dissertation, ITU, Istanbul.
- Boratav, K. 1989. *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-1985(History of Turkish Economy 1908-1985)*, Gerçek, Istanbul.
- Deleuze, G., Guattari, F., Massumi, B. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, The Athlone Press, London.