

In Search of Local Modernism

The Istanbul Drapers' and Furnishers' Bazaar

İDİL ERKOL BİNGÖL

The Istanbul Drapers' and Furnishers' Bazaar (İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı, İMÇ hereafter) is one of the most important modern buildings in Istanbul. It was built in the second part of the 1950s in the scope of a vast urban development project which changed the face of the city.¹ Inspired by this development project, Istanbul textile traders, who were working and using the hostelryes (*hans*)² in the city's Historical Peninsula as their workshops, founded a cooperative in 1954 in order to build a new bazaar. They then applied to the municipality to secure a site for their new bazaar. After several months of site research, they designated for the purpose a narrow, sloping 45,000 m² plot of land on Atatürk Boulevard, part of which had been evacuated as the result of fire damage and the rest of which the municipality appropriated through eminent domain. An open competition was then held in August 1958 to select the master plan for the area that was to house the retail centre. The main issues of the competition were building a connection with the existing urban pattern and creating a similar-scale development area. Among the fourteen projects which joined the competition, the winner was a project by Cihat Fındıkoğlu, Kamil Bayur, Tarık Aka, Niyazi Duranay, and Özdemir Akverdi.³ The winning project suggested a pattern consisting of similar sized units with inner courts as well as corridors and canopies which connected these units to one another. The connection with the neighbourhood was reflected in the preservation and incorporation of the existing streets in the area. After several revisions by the Municipality Zoning Department, carried out under the supervision of the urban counsellor Luigi Piccinato, the winning project took its final shape at the beginning of 1960.⁴

After the approval of the master plan, an invitation only architectural competition was held in February 1960 for the architectural project of the retail centre itself. The project groups which had won the first three prizes in the local master

¹ For further information on the Istanbul Development Project, carried out in the era of prime minister Adnan Menderes, please refer to: Akpınar, İpek. "Menderes İmar Hareketleri Türkleştirme Politikalarının Bir Parçası mıydı?", *Arredamento Mimarlık*, no. 290, (May 2015), 84–118.

² Han is masonry or wooden building with rooms, courtyards, warehouses, and barns that used to host travelers and traders on roads and in towns. Hasol, Doğan. *Ansiklopedik Mimarlık Sözlüğü*, (İstanbul: Yapı Yayın, 2005), 201.

³ Kızılkayak, Görkem. *İmceden İMÇ'ye*, (İstanbul: İstanbul Manifaturacılar ve Kumaşçılar Çarşısı Yayını, 2009), 11–13.

⁴ Tekeli, Doğan. "Manifaturacılar Çarşısı", *Mimarlık: Zor Sanat*, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2012), 164–166.

plan competition were invited to the competition, as were a few outstanding architects of the time. In the end of the evaluation process, the jury, among whose members were Luigi Piccinato and Sedad Hakki Eldem, chose as the winner the project of the youngest architectural group in the competition, namely, the group of Doğan Tekeli, Sami Sisa and Metin Hepgüler, who had taken third place in the previous competition for the local master plan. Their project was a nearly-one-kilometre-long retail-centre building consisting of blocks with inner courts interconnected in various ways by bridges. Before reaching the construction phase, the project went through many revisions.⁵ During the preparation period for the architectural project, the administration of the city changed hands several times, with two different governors and four mayors; therefore, the revision and approval process for the architectural project took a long time.

Urban context and mat building

One of the primary issues in the design process of the İMÇ was its location in the historical peninsula: for the architects, the main goal was for their project to blend with the existing urban environment⁶ and thereby maintain the silhouette of the area, which was dominated by the Süleymaniye Mosque. To this end, they prepared numerous silhouette proposals. The scale of the blocks was shaped according to these silhouette studies. While these studies strengthened the project's relation to the existing urban context, they also eliminated the scale differences among the blocks and altered the articulation of the building façades. The façade articulation was designed by considering the existing built environment, with bay windows and prefabricated cages added to the façades in allusion to the historic wooden houses of the neighbourhood. The blocks, which were originally to be of different shapes and sizes, were revised and placed in a horizontal order with similar geometric forms. The height of the blocks was kept low in relation to the silhouette of the historical peninsula (fig. 1). The horizontal plan configuration allows it to do this. Though it does not resemble the existing urban context, it forms a neutral space which is composed of repetitive units. The low-rise blocks form a pattern with courtyards and squares. This pattern can be evaluated as an example of the 'mat building', one of the important spatial constructions of the period.⁷ The mat-building model was proposed at the meeting of the International Congresses of modern architecture (CIAM) in 1950 and suggested an alternative approach to the historical environment that seemed to be a solution to the young architects' search for a way to blend their project with the existing urban pattern. A Mat-building can be described as a "horizontal city"⁸ which relates to the existing urban context;

⁵ One of the significant revisions was made due to the discovery of the existence of historical graves. After discovering seven historical graves on the plot, the blocks of buildings were arranged so as to leave a wide square in the area of the graves. For further information, see: Tekeli, Doğan. "Manifaturacılar Çarşısı", in *Mimarlık: Zor Sanat*, (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2012), 161–183.

⁶ For further information on the characteristics of the existing urban environment and the neighborhood of İMÇ, see: Benli, Gülhan, and Güner Aysun Ferrah "Two Unique Protected Sites with a Modern Heritage in Historical Peninsula in Istanbul", in *Cultural Influences on Architecture*, ed. Gülşah Koç, Marie-Thérèse Claes and Bryan Christiansen, (Hershey PA: IGI Global, 2017), 130–156.

⁷ For the first essay examining İMÇ in this context, please refer to: Yürekli, Hülya and Yürekli, Ferhan. "Mat-Urban (Dantel Kentsel) Mimarlık ve Manifaturacılar Çarşısı", *Arredamento Mimarlık* (June 2003), 93–98.

⁸ Kenneth Frampton, *Labour, Work and Architecture* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 146.



Fig. 1. İMÇ, view from the minaret of Şebsefa Hatun Mosque. Archive of Tekeli-Sisa Architects.

“labyrinthine clarity”,¹¹ as part of an effort to establish a relationship between the “inner and outer” and the “home and city” in the Amsterdam Orphanage Project. The project was designed as a holistic city model which consisted of low-rise buildings blanketing the land and it pioneered the idea of Mat-Urban.

The Venice Hospital Project, which was designed by the well-known, Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier in 1960, is also another important representative of ‘Mat-Urban’.¹² A later example of the movement is the Berlin Free University Campus, designed by Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic and Shadrach Woods. In 1963, Woods and Manfred Schiedhelm joined the Frankfurt-Römerberg competition with their labyrinth-like design with a Mat-Urban approach which consisted of continuous low-rise building blocks around a set of inner courts blending with the neighbourhood. The project proposed not only a new building typology but also a new alternative approach to the relationship between the historical neighbourhood and modern architecture. This approach was welcomed as a design methodology of the time. Between 1965 and 1975, especially for the design of the university campuses, hospital units and residential settlements, plans with a hori-

it opposes the much-discussed idea of functional tower-blocks (point-blocks) which are disconnected from the city. The Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck, one of the pioneers of this approach, presented his Orphanage Project, designed and built in Amsterdam between 1958 and 1960, at the CIAM meeting in Otterlo⁹ as an alternative to the tower-block typology.¹⁰ According to van Eyck, the reason underlying the alienation in the modern world was the cultural void caused by the dying-out of the vernacular. Modernism, with its new architecture isolated from the traces of history and tradition, embodied these problems of alienation and the search for identity. Over time, searches for locality and properties of vernacular architecture (local material, construction methods, familiar scales, etc.) emerged. This was the context in which van Eyck coined the idea of

⁹ The CIAM meeting in Otterlo provided a forum for a broad discussion of the results and effects of the modern city. Team X left its mark on the meeting with its critiques and reinterpretation of modernism. For further information, see: Mumford, Eric. *The C.I.A.M. Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002) and Frampton, Kenneth. *Modern Architecture, a Critical History*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 276–279.

¹⁰ Cohen, Jean Louis. “Strukturalismus”, In *The Future of Architecture Since 1889*, (New York: Phaidon, 2012), 115–116.

¹¹ Hertzberger, Hermann. Van Roijen-Wortmann, Addie. and Strauven, Francis. *Aldo van Eyck, Hubertus House*, (Amsterdam: Stichting Wonen, 1982), 11–12.

¹² Mumford, Eric. “The Emergence of Mat or Field Buildings”, In *Le Corbusier’s Venice Hospital and the Mat Building Revival*, ed. Hashim Sarkis (Harvard: Prestel Publishing, 2001), 48–66.

zontal-city approach were quite common,¹³ with such plans taking the place of those for big, high-scale mono-blocks; however, most such plans were never realised.



Fig. 2. An aerial view of the Historical Peninsula (1968) and the site plan of İMÇ. *İstanbul Manifaturalar Çarşısı* (Catalogue. İstanbul, 1968), 10. Archive of Tekeli-Sisa Architects.

Taking the era and the spatial configuration into account, the relation of the İMÇ to the city context can be considered as a product of the above-mentioned approach. Although Doğan Tekeli states that they were not aware of the concept of mat-building during the design stage of the project and rather that they took the local hans as their guide while creating the project configuration,¹⁴ its spatial characteristics can be seen as a part of this approach. The retail centre consists of similarly sized building blocks with inner courts and semi-open corridors connecting these building blocks. Thanks to the street-square design of the ground floor, the building is connected both to the streets leading to the Süleymaniye Neighbourhood and to the boulevard which runs parallel to the site. The horizontal plan helps the retail centre look humble; however, the scale of the building blocks is much larger than that of the neighbouring buildings. The careful attention that was paid to preventing the height of the buildings from overshadowing the historical neighbourhood was not paid to the site plan. In one of his assessments of the

¹³ Though never constructed, the Istanbul Technical University Ayazağa Campus Plan designed and proposed by Kemal Ahmet Arû and his project group is an example of a typical mat-building. In the plan, the stairs are located at the joints where the buildings intersect one another. In that way, vertical circulation axes are connected to horizontal circulation axes. For further information, see: “İTÜ Ayazağa Kampüsü”, *Mimarlık*, no. 110, (December 1972), 67–78.

¹⁴ Taken from the speech of Doğan Tekeli during his presentation on his project at Istanbul Bilgi University on 5 December 2013.

project, Doğan Tekeli criticises himself and his project group over the scale of the building blocks, saying that while they were successful in balancing the block heights, they were not able to articulate that same attention to scale on the floor plans.¹⁵ The scale difference between the centre and its surroundings is very obvious in the aerial photos (fig. 2). However, one does not feel any difference in terms of scale while walking in and around the building thanks to the diligent articulation studies of the architects on the silhouette.

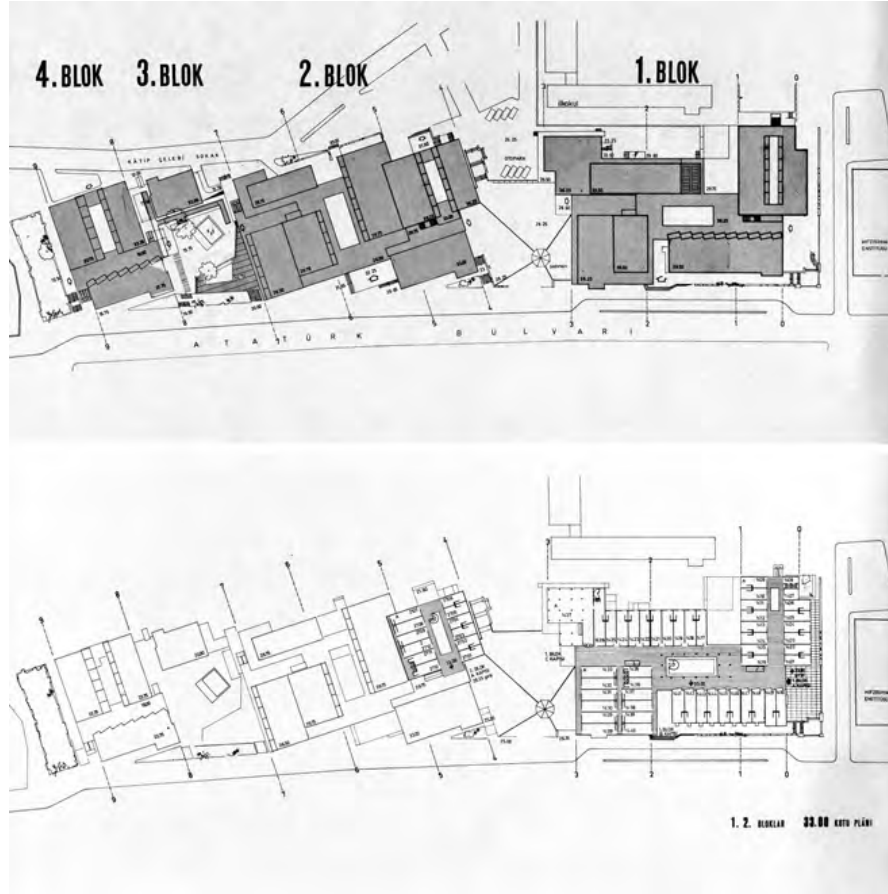


Fig. 3. Partial site plan of the blocks and ground floor plan of the first block. *İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı*. (Catalogue. İstanbul, 1968), 94. Archive of Tekeli-Sisa Architects.

A han or a shopping mall?

The architects refer to two inspirations they drew upon when conceiving the spatial plan of the centre: the hans and workshops of the previous tenants and American shopping malls. Tekeli draws a resemblance between these and the İMÇ; in that all are inward-oriented buildings.¹⁶ In contrast to the relation between the shops and the street on the ground level, at higher levels the inner space becomes the focus of the design: life takes place in the inner courtyards; however, it does not com-

¹⁵ Taken from the speech of Doğan Tekeli during his presentation on his project at Istanbul Bilgi University on 5 December 2013.

¹⁶ Tekeli. *Mimarlık Zor Sanat*, 167.

pletely enclose itself as in American shopping malls (fig. 3). The inner courts of the İMÇ are not isolated places; on the contrary, they serve as a connecting architectural element in the design. The retail centre builds up a relationship with its surroundings thanks to its porous and penetrable characteristics and connects the Süleymaniye Neighbourhood to the boulevard in front of the building.

The elevated streets of İMC

The pedestrian circulation in the building takes place outside, through open, canopied corridors. One of the important points in the plan configuration of the retail centre was to revive and protect the notion of the 'street'. In the project, they pose the idea of protecting the vivid street life of the area and creating a section which creates a 'city buzz' between the building and the city. Even though the architects themselves did not put any emphasis on this when describing the project, its inner court-street network constitutes the fundamental characteristic of the İMÇ.¹⁷ The pedestrian flow can run uninterrupted through the inner courts and open corridors (fig. 4). Utilising the slope of the land, entrances to the building are provided without any stairs at the ground floor.

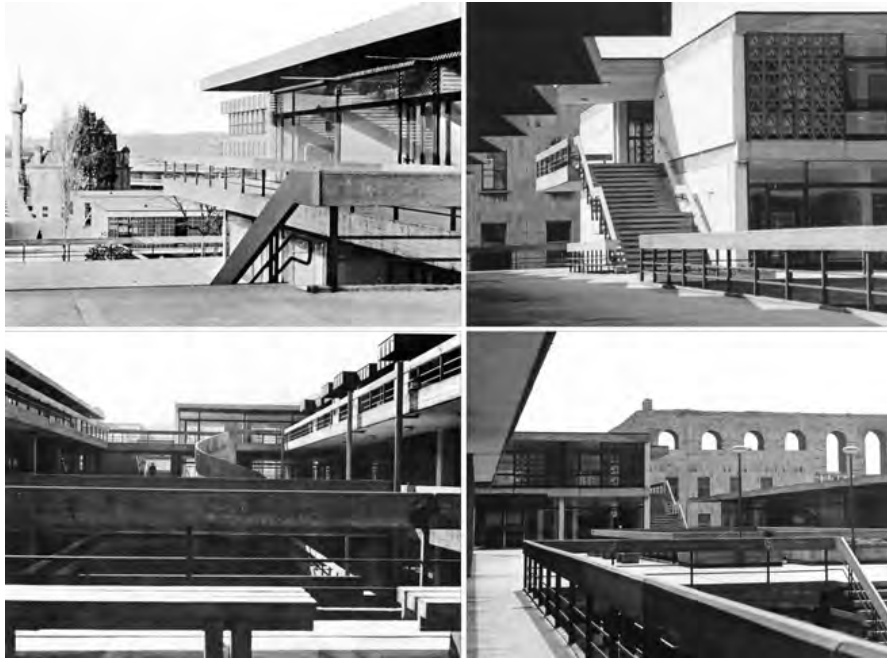


Fig. 4. Views from the inner courts and semi-open corridors connecting the building blocks of İMÇ. *İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı*. (Catalogue. İstanbul, 1968) 42, 76. Archive of Tekeli-Sisa Architects.

The İMÇ created a new notion of the retail centre. Both the building itself and its new notion of public space were unique for residents of the city, who were accustomed only to the city's old hans, the car traffic on its narrow streets and its non-existent pedestrian ways. In fact, back then pedestrianisation was a new concept not only for Istanbul but for the whole world. One of the first examples of the

¹⁷ According to the architects, the main issue was how to relate the building to the Süleymaniye Mosque. Kızılkayak. *İmceden İMÇ'ye*, 16.

pedestrianisation movement was the Lijnbaan, built in 1949–1953 in Rotterdam. It was designed by the architects Johannes van den Broek and Jaap Bakema and was constructed on the site of an old marketplace which had been eradicated by bombs during World War II. In the Lijnbaan, the shops were aligned along the wide pedestrianised streets. After its opening in 1953, the project grabbed a lot of international attention as a new form of public place and became an example that many other projects followed.¹⁸ In the United States of America, two of the first pedestrianised shopping centres were the Fort Worth Downtown Project (1956) and Kalamazoo Mall (1959), which were designed by the architect Victor Gruen.¹⁹ Doğan Tekeli followed the works of Gruen, who was also the architect to design the very first American mall.²⁰

In the same period, Team X, one of the main actors of the revisionist-modern approach, criticised the urbanist perspective of CIAM in their presentations at the congress held in Otterlo.²¹ The new concepts Team X put forward were the starting point of a new architectural approach, a critique of modern architecture and new design proposals. These new concepts included mobility, identity, in-between, organic integrity, core, cluster, spatial hierarchy and patterns, change and growth, urbanisation and habitat.²² The projects Team X presented prioritised pedestrian flow; they proposed the idea of ‘streets in the air’ which carry the pedestrian flow to upper floors.²³ The relationship between the built environment and social life, forgotten since the beginning of the 20th century, thus became an inspiration to architects once again.²⁴ The sterile spatial configuration of modernism and its interrupted relationship with public life were criticised, while the relationship between home and street, people and street and old settlements and traditional urban patterns were explored with new vigour.²⁵ In many of their projects, the private space-street relationship was reinterpreted in a way that aimed to carry the vitality of street life to the upper floors of a building.

The spatial plans of the İMÇ share commonalities with the arguments of Team X and the concepts put forward at CIAM. Pedestrian movement was given importance in the project. The pedestrian’s relationship with the street is redefined by creating a pedestrian deck, providing spatial integrity and visual connectivity and carrying the dynamism of the street to the upper levels. The cores of the block are inner courts and these courts form different kinds of clusters with the shops gathered around them. In line with their revisionist approach to modernism, the

¹⁸ Lüchinger, Arnulf. *Strukturalismus in Architektur und Städtebau*, (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 1981).

¹⁹ Australian architect Victor Gruen (1903–1980) has been recognised as a mall architect for the substantial number of mall projects he designed. For further information, see: Hardwick, Jeffrey. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

²⁰ In a conference on 6 November 2013 at Istanbul Bilgi University, Doğan Tekeli cited Gruen as a source of inspiration in the design of the İMÇ.

²¹ Team X’s projects and critiques of the strict principles of modernism had a great influence on the development of architectural thought after World War II. In their presentations, they suggested new approaches by examining the differences between the old and the modern urban patterns. For further information, see: Smithson, Alison. and Smithson, Peter. *Team 10 Primer*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1968).

²² Bosman, Jos. and Boyer, Christine. *Team 10: In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953–1981*, (Rotterdam: NAIPublisher, 2006), 82.

²³ Bosman. and Boyer. *Team 10: In Search of a Utopia of the Present 1953–1981*, 30.

²⁴ Banham, Reyner. *Brutalism in der Architektur*, (Stuttgart: Karl-Krämer Verlag, 1966), 70.

²⁵ Lüchinger, Arnulf. *Strukturalismus in Architektur und Städtebau*, (Stuttgart: Karl-Krämer Verlag, 1981)

architects, tasked with designing something modern next to a historical neighbourhood, revised the design at each phase. While discussing the idiosyncratic characteristics of the İMÇ and comparing it to its surroundings, Tekeli points at the diameter of the dome atop the Süleymaniye Mosque and compares it to the length of the retail centre: the diameter of the dome which gives the mosque its magnificence is 28 meters, whereas the length of the İMÇ, which was not supposed to compete with or dwarf the Süleymaniye Complex, is 800 meters. To overcome this large difference in scale and to diminish and balance out the size of the İMÇ to ensure that it did not dominate the mosque, the architects worked through the movements of the blocks of buildings, the articulation of the building façades and the scale of the shopping complex. Tekeli also mentions that the reason why they did not opt for a megablock, similar to that of Le Corbusier, was to ensure that the retail centre did not detract from the magnificence of the Süleymaniye Mosque. In order to create a building that respected the historical environment, all blocks in the centre were designed using a fragmented typology and a public-orientated urban morphology,²⁶ with lengths of 30–40 meters and with three to four floors. The massiveness of the blocks was interrupted with protrusions, balconies and niches on the façades. The shops, being the smallest units of the İMÇ, were composed on a similar scale as the surrounding buildings and were placed here and there at an angle to create a space opening onto the Süleymaniye Mosque, Şebsefa Hatun Mosque, Şehzade Mosque and Bozdoğan Aqueduct.

Art as an architectural element

With its modernist form and the brutalist approach evident in its building materials, the İMÇ stands as an important example of modern Turkish architecture. The variety of materials used on the façade was deliberately kept to a minimum and the horizontal effect highlighted with white travertine-covered walls and exposed concrete at the floor levels. Prefabricated cage elements along the exposed concrete surfaces allude to the caged windows in traditional buildings in the area. An additional reference to the local is the art pieces installed in the centre. Another revisionist approach, born as an answer to the identity crisis Modern Architecture experienced after the war, was the synthesis of art and architecture.²⁷ The İMÇ hosts numerous important examples of this synthesis movement in Turkey, which, like other revisionist movements, were widely accepted in the 1950s and 1960s. As in the case of the architectural project, the artwork placed in the İMÇ was also chosen through an invitation-only competition. First, the locations in the complex where different pieces of artwork were to be placed were designated by the architects, following which three pairs of artists per piece of artwork were invited to participate in the competition. The artists were expected to decide on the topics of the artwork they created. The winners of the competition were the sculptor Kuzgun Acar, who was chosen for the sculpture on the façade; Ali Teoman Germaner for the lithography work; Yavuz Görey for the marble pool; Füreyya Koral

²⁶ Bozdoğan, Sibel. and Akcan, Esra. "Architecture under Coups d'État", *Modern Architectures in History: Turkey*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 175.

²⁷ The art-and-architecture synthesis emerged at a time when the demands of local traces and identities had increased but could not be met by the formal idiom of modernism with its strict rules. For further information, see: Giedion, Siegfried. "Introduction-Questionnaire, Bridgwater, 1947", *A Decade of New Architecture*, (Zürich: Girsberger, 1951), 30–35.

and Sadi Diren for the ceramic tiles; and Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Eren Eyüboğlu and Nedim Günsür for the mosaic tiles. The sculpture *Birds* by Kuzgun Acar on the façade was selected as the symbol of the building and the rest of the artwork was placed at the entrances and in the common places of the building (fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Views from the Atatürk Boulevard. The sculpture Birds (Kuşlar) by Kuzgun Acar on the façade has been taken as the symbol of the building and the mosaic tiles, placed at the entrance of the second block, bear Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's signature. An inner look of a newly opened store. The photographs were taken shortly after completion. İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı (Catalogue. İstanbul, 1968) 11, 19, 36. Archive of Tekeli-Sisa Architects.

The foremost criterion in the design of the İMÇ was the building's relation to its surrounding context. Every stage of the complex, from the competition project report to its publicity report, highlighted the effort to maintain a reference to the historical neighbourhood and at the same time, to justify the modernist approach, isolated from historical imagery. There were two rationales underlying the architects' endeavours to justify the spatial configuration and the architectural style of the project. The first was that the architects wanted to justify their modernist approach with references to the historical neighbourhood. Building a structure in the historical peninsula was a sensitive situation and the architects were keen to show that they were aware of the responsibility that designing a building on the outskirts of Süleymaniye requires.²⁸ The second was that they wanted to prove their design a part of the modernist movement. The architects based their architectural configuration on two essential pieces of data: the context and the building program. Within the frame of these two rationales, they sought to design an impressive modern building complex. Back then, the İMÇ was recognised as the largest building in Istanbul to be constructed at one time. Unfortunately, in time, the brutalist-style façade of the building has not aged well. The exposed concrete surfaces have been covered with paint and plaster and the prefabricated cages replaced, ostensibly because they were old. Additionally, shop owners have covered

²⁸ Tekeli. *Mimarlık Zor Sanat*, 169.

the fronts of their shops with advertisement boards which have interrupted the integrity of the façade.

Nevertheless, the İMÇ remains a distinctive architectural project where modern architectural principles meet and mingle with references taken from the local urban context and the intensity of the building program – a significant part of modern architectural heritage in Turkey.²⁹

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²⁹ This chapter has been edited and proofread by Hugh Turner.

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