

“Les Transformations d’Istanbul”: Henri Prost’s planning of Istanbul (1936-1951)

Cânâ BILSEL

Middle East Technical University Department of Architecture, Ankara, TURKEY

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Abstract:

Henri Prost, who was one of the founders of town planning in France, was invited to prepare the master plan of Istanbul by the Turkish government in 1935. He conducted the planning of the historic capital and the most populous city of Turkey from 1936 to 1951. Although Prost has been renowned particularly with his conservative attitude toward the cultural heritage and the assets of the natural landscape, curiously he adopted a highly interventionist planning approach in Istanbul.

“Les Transformations d’Istanbul” is the title of his speech at the Institut de France in September 1947. This title, which he gave later to the collection of his planning notes, reveals the principal goal of his planning in Istanbul on the basis of three principal issues: transportation, hygiene and aesthetics. The aimed transformation was twofold: it consisted in restructuring the city as a whole mainly by establishing a new transportation infrastructure, and reshaping the urban fabric by intervening on the building and population density of the existing centers. In line with the idea of a “concentration plan,” the plans that he prepared for the historic peninsula were directed to rationalize the street network and to increase the building density. But, while Prost intervened radically on the historic fabric of the city, he also cared for the “total effect” in Istanbul’s skyline. Prost’s plans, which were partly implemented during and after his stay in Istanbul, had long lasting effects on the city’s transformation.

Introductionⁱ

When the foundation of the Republic was proclaimed in October 1923, the decision to relocate the capital to Ankara was taken almost simultaneously. Istanbul, the old imperial capital was deprived of its title by this strategic as much as symbolic decision of the new regime. Some historians assert that the old capital city was intentionally neglected and deprived of public funds in the early republican period. However, although it is true that the meager funds of the Republic were mostly canalized to the construction of the new capital, a competition was organized for the planning of Istanbul in 1933, only a decade after its foundation. For the young Republic, the modernization of the old capital city was a task as imperious as the construction of its new capital.

City planning was granted a particular importance as part of the Republic's modernization program. The new discipline, which had emerged in the West with the claim to plan cities according to the needs of the industrial age at the turn of the century, was regarded as an effective tool for urban modernization in Turkey. The Republican authorities perceived it as a specialization from which they could benefit in shaping urban spaces, setting the infrastructure and providing facilities required by a modern social life.

Istanbul, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, had been subject to several modernization attempts put into implementation in parallel with the reform movements since the early 19th century (Çelik, 1993). In continuity with these, the Republican regime aimed, however, at a more radical transformation in urban space in line with the intended societal changes. In the early Republican period, Istanbul was a city with a recessed population; therefore, the main motive of planning was not concerned with directing or controlling the existing growth, but it aimed at modernizing the urban space.

A planning competition for Istanbul

A competition by invitation was held, for the first time in 1928, for the planning of the capital Ankara. The German city planning professor, Hermann Jansen's proposal was selected by the jury and the implementation plan of Ankara was approved in 1932 (Tankut, 1990). A few months later, another urban planning competition was held for the historic capital Istanbul.ⁱⁱ Donat-Alfred Agache and Henri Prost were first invited from France to participate in the competition; Jacques Henri Lambert was called upon after Prost declined the invitation. An invitation was sent out also to German planner, Hermann Ehlgötz. All three specialists were chosen for their professional experience and achievements. Agache had won the second prize in the planning competition held for the Australian capital Canberra and prepared the development plans of two major cities in South America, namely Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. Lambert had participated in the planning of New York and Chicago and was then collaborating with Henri Prost in the planning of the Paris metropolitan area. And finally, Hermann Ehlgötz had prepared the plans of various cities across Germany and he was recognized for his outstanding work in the planning of the industrial city of Essen (Anonymous, 1935: 62).

This competition by invitation could also be regarded as a consultancy in which the Municipality demanded from the town planning specialists to present their proposals on the future city of Istanbul.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, in the letter sent out to the planners by the Municipality of Istanbul on 26 February 1933, it was clearly stated that this was not a "planning competition," but the objective was to take the specialists' views. Yet, it was also mentioned that the Municipality reserved the right to choose to work with one particular specialist at the end. Agache, Lambert and Ehlgötz submitted their plan proposals and reports towards the end of 1933 (Anonymous, 1935).

All three projects presented alternatives for the future location of the Istanbul port, the industrial zone and the commercial center. They all proposed to develop Istanbul as an international port and an industrial city. The location of the harbor was one of the primary criteria in the jury's selection. While Agache foresaw the development of the port along the southern bank and the industries along the northern bank of the Golden Horn, Lambert proposed to create a new harbor on the Marmara coast of the city, in relation

with the railway line that connected Istanbul to Europe. Lambert suggested the development of a large industrial zone in connection with both the railway line and the harbor. Ehlgötz was the only one who considered the possibility of developing the port of Haydarpaşa at the Asian side. The jury selected Ehlgötz's proposal partly because it located the harbor in relation with the Anatolian railway. The central government saw the port of Istanbul vital for the provision of goods to the country.

Ehlgötz's project was founded more realistic and more respectful to the urban character of the historic city. The planner emphasized the necessity to conserve "the Oriental and Turkish civilization in Istanbul" by preserving the urban structure and architectural monuments through specific urban regulations (Ehlgötz, 1934: 25). He contented to enlarge some avenues for facilitating the circulation. In opposition to the German planner's conservative attitude, the two French urbanists proposed the opening of large avenues that cut across the historic fabric of the city. Both approaches had proponents among the Turkish intelligentsia. Yet, Ehlgötz's conservative plan was chosen by the jury, that was formed of Turkish bureaucrats and technicians, for its being applicable besides its emphasis on conserving Istanbul's historic character.

However, Ehlgötz's plan was never put into implementation. Instead, the Municipality of Istanbul continued to search for a planner, and consulted Martin Wagner in this context. Wagner, who had directed the city planning unit of the Berlin Municipality, came to Istanbul after he left Germany for political reasons and taught in the School of Fine Arts for a while. He prepared a consultancy report that emphasized the economic dimension of urbanization both in regional and city scale. (Wagner, 1934) In the meantime, the Municipality of Istanbul re-invited Henri Prost, in 1935, this time directly to conduct the planning of the city.

Istanbul's choice: Henri Prost, the *urbanist*

Henri Prost was one of the leading figures of the first generation of French architect-urbanists. He won the *Prix de Rome* after his graduation from the *École des Beaux Arts*. He studied at Villa Medici together with Tony Garnier, Léon Jaussely, Ernest Hébrard, who all became pioneers of the French *urbanism*. Prost's career of urbanist began with his winning entry for Antwerp in 1910. He collaborated in the activities of "Urban and Rural Hygiene" at the Sixth Section of the *Musée Social* (Cohen, 1996 and 2010). In 1913, he was invited by Maréchal Lyautey, the military governor of the French Protectorate, to found the *Service des Plans* (planning office) in Morocco, where he realized a comprehensive planning work for several cities, including Fez, Marrakesh, Meknes, Rabat and Casablanca (Cohen 2010, Cohen and Eleb, 1998). Prost's planning of the Moroccan towns is characterized by his protectionist attitude *vis-à-vis* the old *casbahs* in contrast to the new European neighborhoods that he planned. This planning approach, associated with French colonialism, has been the object of post-colonial criticism, for being a policy of isolating the indigenous population from the European new comers (Wright, 1991). In his return to France, Prost worked on the regional planning of Côte Varoise from 1922 to 1924, in which he paid particular attention to the preservation of the "picturesque" values of the landscape (Haudebert, 1995). Finally, starting from 1932, he directed the regional planning of the metropolitan area of Paris; the *Plan d'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne* was approved in 1939 (Royer, 1961).

Henri Prost's acquaintance with Turkey and Istanbul dates back to 1904, when he first came to the Ottoman capital to study the archaeological remains of the Ancient city within the framework of *Prix de Rome Program*. He stayed in Istanbul from September 1905 to January 1906 and submitted to the *Académie d'Architecture* impressive drawings of Hagia Sophia and restitutions of Constantine's imperial palace in 1910 (Pinon, 2010). He came back to Istanbul in 1911, and during his stay, he developed good relations with a circle of Turkish intellectuals. Prost wrote in his notes that Cemil (Topuzlu) Paşa, who became Mayor of Istanbul during the rule of Union and Progress Party, invited him to develop plans for Istanbul in 1912 (Prost, 1939-1950), which could not be realized because of the First World War. The Government of Ankara contacted Henri Prost, for the first time for the reconstruction of Izmir destroyed by the fire of 1922, at the end of the Greco-Turkish war. Although Prost delegated this task to his colleagues René and Raymond Danger, he worked as a consultant in the preparation of the Izmir plan (Bilsel, 1996).

Prost was invited by the Municipality of Istanbul to the planning competition held in 1933. However, as he was occupied by the Master Plan of Paris metropolitan area at the time, he had to decline the invitation. In early 1934, he was re-invited to study the planning of the Yalova Thermal Station, where the President Atatürk's summer residence was located. He received an invitation by the governor-mayor of Istanbul to conduct the planning of the city a few months after he came to study the Yalova plan in the summer of 1935.^{iv} A question to be clarified at this point is whether Henri Prost was personally invited by the president himself. In a book entitled, "The Works of Henri Prost" edited by his colleagues in Prost's memory after his death, it is noted that the invitations were "deemed appropriate" by Atatürk (Leveau, 1960). The fact that Prost was asked to plan the two settlements, Yalova and Florya, where the presidential residences were located, supports this hypothesis. Besides the fact that the French architect-urbanist was already known by the Turkish authorities, his being the chief planner of Paris certainly played also an important role in Istanbul Municipality's choice to designate Prost as consultant to the planning of Istanbul.

The master plan of Istanbul by Prost: A "concentration plan"

From 1936 to 1951, Henri Prost oversaw the planning of Istanbul as a consultant to the Municipality's Directory of Urban Development. His fifteen years of planning activity in Istanbul covers a wide range of studies, including the Master Plan for the European side of the city (1937), Master Plan of the Asian side (1939), the planning of the two coasts of the Bosphorus (1936-1948) and numerous detailed urban projects for plazas, squares, construction of new avenues, parks and promenades. Henri Prost first completed the Master Plan for the European Side of Istanbul in 1937, which was approved in June 1939. The Master Plan was formed of two separate plans of 1/5000 scale, namely the Old Istanbul Plan (the south of the Golden Horn) and the Plan of Galata-Pera (the north of the Golden Horn). (Figures 1 and 2)

Istanbul suffered from a significant population decrease in the 1930s. The city's population, which had reached 1 million prior to the First World War, had shrunk to 700,000 by 1927 (Toprak, 1994, Tekeli, 2009). Although a certain increase was observed, the population was still around 740,000 in the 1930s. But paradoxically, the city faced problems in transportation due to

its expansion towards the periphery with the development of new extension areas. Areas destroyed by fires in Old Istanbul remained as large, vacant lots. Yet, Istanbul's central business district continued to develop in and around Eminönü-Grand Bazaar area (Prost, 1936a and 1947). With the objective to cope with the ongoing sprawl, Henri Prost concluded that rather than an "urban extension plan" (*Plan d'Extension*) adopted in the case of Paris, the Master Plan of Istanbul had to be an "urban concentration plan" (*Plan de Concentration*) (Prost, 1943, Royer, 1961). According to Prost, the historical core of the city would continue to be the center of the agglomeration in the future as it had been in the past. For this, he put emphasis on the measures to facilitate the motorized circulation in the city.



Figure 1. Istanbul European Side Master Plan at 1/5000 scale, Old Istanbul, by Henri Prost, 1937, (Académie de l'Architecture/Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine/Archives d'Architecture du XX^e Siècle)



Figure 2. *Istanbul European Side Master Plan at 1/5000 scale, Galata-Pera (Beyoğlu), by Henri Prost, 1937, (Académie de l'Architecture/Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine/Archives d'Architecture du XX^e Siècle*

“*Les Transformations d'Istanbul*” was the title of Prost’s speech in the *Institut de France* in September 1947 (Prost, 1947). This title, which he gave later to the collection of his notes, revealed the principal goal of his planning activity in Istanbul. The aimed transformation was twofold: the structural transformation of the existing city by setting a transportation infrastructure and a system of green spaces; and the transformation of the existing urban fabric. Henri Prost based his Master Plan of Istanbul on three fundamental issues: Transportation (*la circulation*), hygiene (*l’hygiène*) and “aesthetics” (*l’esthétique*).

An urban transportation infrastructure

Prost’s Master Plan for the European Side of Istanbul basically reorganized the city “around a spine,” which was to be formed around two principal arteries that would connect the newly developing settlement areas at the north to the old city and the central business district (Prost, 1937). (Figure 3) Atatürk Boulevard that traversed the historic peninsula from north to south was a part of the spine. According to Prost, the opening of this boulevard was an urban operation of primary importance. The second main artery in the north-south direction, crossing the Golden Horn with the Galata Bridge would lead towards the historic commercial district. The two main arteries would extend from the bridges of Atatürk and Galata towards Taksim at the north, and would complete the spine (Prost, 1937). These roads would cross the hills and valleys through tunnels and viaducts with the least amount of expropriation possible. Henri Prost emphasized that when compared to the system he had devised for Paris, the transportation network he proposed for Istanbul was “more modern”, as it was based on an auto-route system that would provide uninterrupted transportation in the city, traversing the center from one end to the other.

Prost studied particularly the street network of the historic peninsula, and proposed the opening of numerous new avenues to facilitate transportation within the old city. (Figure 4) The historic road commencing with Divan Yolu

at Sultanahmet Square, would fork into three separate roads at the public plaza created in front of Murat Paşa complex in Aksaray. Of these three, the southernmost road converged with the “*cornice*” route paralleling the shore and oriented towards Yedikule. The road in the north followed the valley of Bayrampaşa –Ancient Lycos- Creek and ended at a public square in front of the entrance of a large park to be created. The main boulevard that stretched in the center was indicated as the “Istanbul-Edirne-London” road in the Master Plan. Prost conceived this road as the gateway to the city from west and envisaged it as the start of the international motorway that reached London via Belgium’s Port of Ostend. In the plan report dated 1937, the names of the two roads were identified as “Vatan” (the Motherland) and “Millet” (Nation) boulevards, respectively (Prost, 1937). These avenues were opened with the same names as a part of the ambitious urban operations led by the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes two decades later (Akpınar, 2010).



Figure 3. *Istanbul European Side Master Plan – Principal roads indicated on a photograph from the model of 1/2000 scale, circa 1943, (Académie de l’Architecture/Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine/Archives d’Architecture du XX^e Siècle)*

Another major artery proposed in the 1937 Master Plan by Prost, was the coastal road that started from Sarayburnu and extended along the Marmara shore. In his report, the urbanist wrote that with its panoramic view overlooking the Marmara Sea and the Bosphorus from Sarayburnu, the “Coastal Boulevard” would be an “unrivalled promenade” in Istanbul (Prost, 1937). The Yenikapı-Yedikule coastal road, which was proposed as a scenic *cornice* road in continuation of this coastal boulevard would provide access to the city’s suburbs and the airport, at Yeşilköy and Florya.

In the Master Plan, special emphasis was put on the International Train Station and Ferry Port located on the Marmara shore of the Historic

Peninsula. The International Train Station, located at Yenikapı where Atatürk Boulevard ended, was envisaged as the terminal of the railway line coming in from Europe. Next to the train station, a ferry port was to provide the transportation of trains to Haydarpaşa across the sea, establishing a connection between the European and Anatolian (Asian) railways.

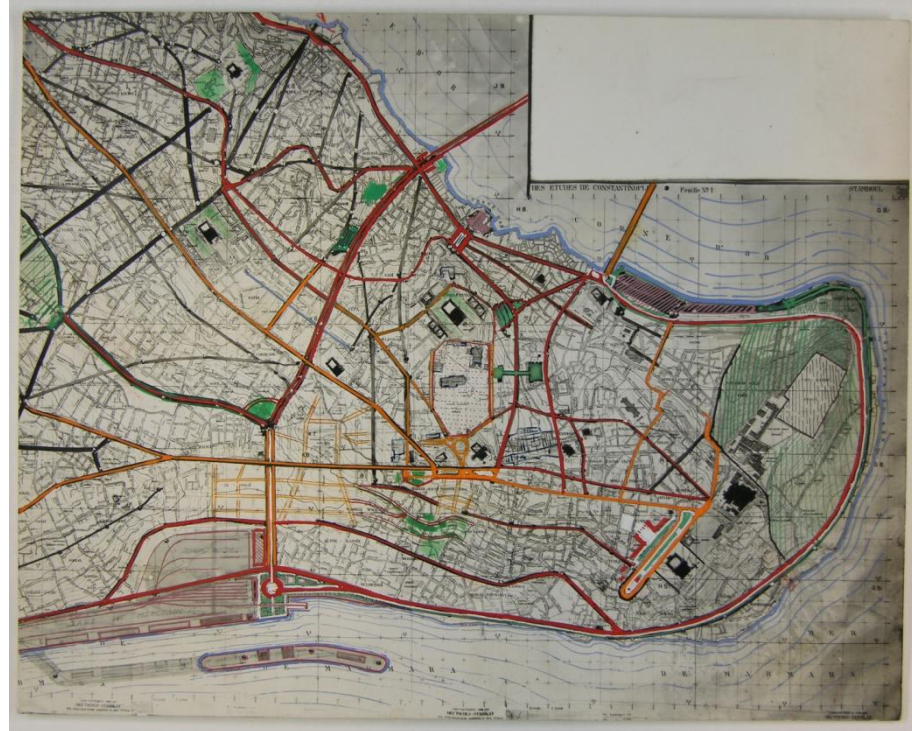


Figure 4. Study of a road network for the Old Istanbul Master Plan by Henri Prost, (Académie de l'Architecture/Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine/Archives d'Architecture du XX^e Siècle)

“Espaces libres”

The *espaces libres*, constituted a significant component of the urban transformation in Prost's Master Plan of Istanbul. In his reports, the urbanist used the term as a spatial category that encompassed all public open spaces, including parks, promenades, esplanades, panoramic terraces, boulevards, as well as sports areas. Among these, two parks at the heart of the old city and another large park in the center of the new development areas at the north were distinguished both in terms of the area they covered and the special functions they were endowed with.

The Archaeological Park, located at the tip of the historic peninsula, extended from Sarayburnu to the south of Sultanahmet including the Topkapı Palace and the Byzantine Hippodrome. It was a significant project that combined archaeology and recreation. Prost conceived this park as an open-air museum and a promenade that would form a picturesque landscape.

The second park, planned in the historic city, extended from the Byzantine Land Walls towards the city center along the valley of Bayrampaşa Creek. In the 1930s, as it was throughout history, the area was covered with vegetable gardens. Initially, Prost had proposed to maintain the function of this area

and to rearrange it as small gardens of the existing and future districts that would be created for low-income groups and workers. Such a model existed actually in several European cities and in the case of Istanbul it represented the continuation of a cultural and economic practice that had existed historically. However, this park was named “*Parc Éducatif*” in the Master Plan and was translated as “Kültür Park” (Culture Park) into Turkish in another copy of the plan. Referred to as Park no. 1 in Prost’s reports, it was planned to include a botanical garden and a zoo, as well as displays of natural history and natural science to serve the education of the public. Vatan Avenue ended at a large public square at the entrance of the park and continued from this point on towards the city walls as the promenade of the park. The Park extended with areas allocated to sports on both sides of the Land Walls. In his reports dating back to 1936 and 1943, Prost suggested that the Olympic Games could be organized in Istanbul in the future, and he underlined that these areas had to be developed accordingly. He believed that the background outlined by the Byzantine Land Walls would provide an unrivaled setting for the Olympics (Prost, 1936c and 1943).

Park No. 2 was another large green area located at the northern section of the city. In the Master Plan of Galata and Pera, the deep valley between Maçka and Harbiye stretching towards Dolmabahçe was reserved as a wide green strip at the heart of a new housing zone. (Prost, 1937: 9-10) Prost, who imagined this park as “Taksim’s Boulogne Woods”, defined it as the “recreation center” and “lungs” of the new settlement area. The urbanist paid special attention to the arrangement of vehicle lanes and promenades traversing this valley, which opened up to the view of the Bosphorus. Dolmabahçe Stadium, Sports and Exhibition Hall, and the Amphitheater are functions that Prost later added to his design of Park No. 2. In the Master Plan, Park No. 2 was connected to İnönü Esplanade that Prost designed in the place of an old military casern at Taksim. The planner’s idea was to create a continuous green strip, a promenade park, at the center of the planned development.

Prost’s *espaces libres*, formed of a variety of open spaces including parks, esplanades, promenades, panoramic terraces, public squares and sports areas, were all part of the network of public open spaces and green areas. These spaces, which the urbanist introduced as indispensable components of a healthy urban development, were also thought as spaces that would stimulate a modern urban way of life. They were regarded as symbolic spaces of the societal modernization that was intended by the Republican regime (Akpınar, 2010b and c)

Transformation of the historic city

What Henri Prost meant by the transformation of Istanbul consisted in the restructuring of the city as a whole, mainly by laying out a new transportation infrastructure and large green spaces; but also intervening on the building and population density of the existing centers.

In line with the idea of a “concentration plan,” Prost aimed at transforming Old Istanbul into a mid-rise settlement embedded in large green areas that would provide “the best physical and mental hygiene conditions” for its dwellers (Prost, 1937:7). According to him, the existing urban fabric had a superfluous number of streets, which had been opened as a result of piecemeal parceling of the area after each fire. Furthermore, there were

large vacant lots destroyed by fires and individual houses that remained intact on certain streets. He argued that the street layout and parceling of the old districts were too irregular; they were not in harmony with the significance and the aesthetics of the new avenues and streets to be opened in the Historical Peninsula. Therefore, they had to be reorganized in a rational manner; the parcels had to be consolidated and rearranged. In the place small private gardens, public green spaces were to be created through expropriation when necessary. The urbanist envisaged “a new block design in harmony with the importance, width, and aesthetic of each avenue” (Prost, 1937: 8). In fact, this meant a complete renewal of Istanbul’s historic fabric. The arrangements done on both sides of Atatürk Boulevard through expropriation and consolidation of the old parcels were an example to that. (Figure 5)

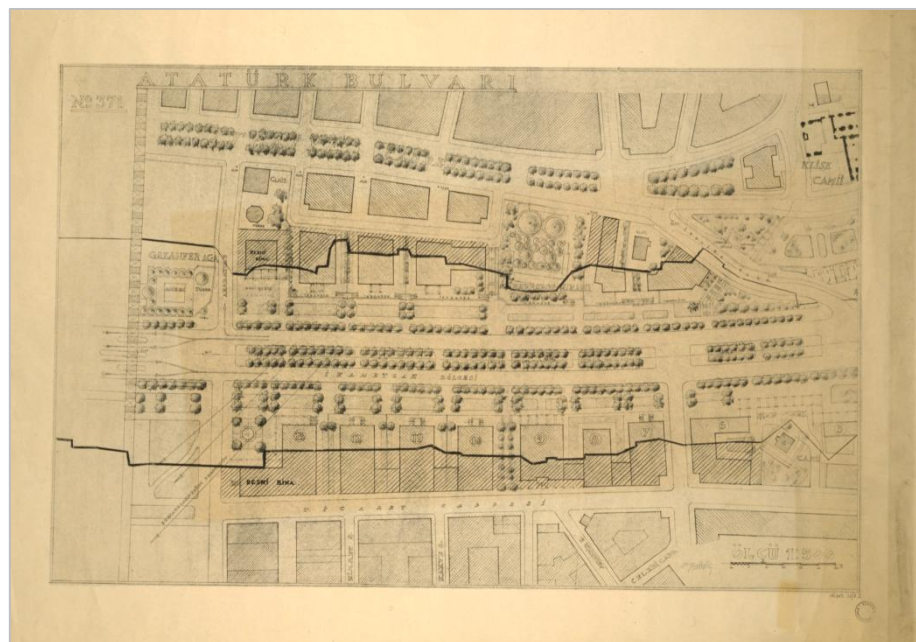


Figure 5. Project of Atatürk Boulevard at 1/500 scale by Henri Prost. Transformation within the limits of expropriation. Sector between the Aquaduct of Valens and the Zeyrek Mosque (Pantocrator Monastery-Church), (Académie de l'Architecture/Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine/Archives d'Architecture du XX^e Siècle)

According to the French urbanist, the Marmara shore of the old city was endowed with “one of the most beautiful views of the world” (Prost, 1937: 32). Therefore he proposed the transformation of the existing neighborhoods alongside the coast and railroad line, which he qualified as “derelict,” into a new settlement area of high-standing housing blocks. The creation of a promenade and a belvedere by submerging the railway line in this area was a proposal that Prost strongly insisted upon (Prost, 1943). He also planned “workers’ quarters” alongside the Land Walls at the south of Park No. 1. Later the International Exhibition project that he proposed, in 1943, as part of his decennial plan in the framework of the commemorative program for the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul by Mehmet II, was meant to be a planning tool to enable the transformation of this derelict area into a high standing housing neighborhood (Prost, 1943).

While Prost argued that, the *intra-muros* city needed a “concentration plan,” he pointed out the necessity to decrease the density in the Galata and Beyoğlu districts for the purpose of “hygiene.” The population and building densities were considerably high in these districts, and the physical conditions were not in conformity with the environmental hygiene regulations. Prost asserted that “theoretically, the northern shore of Golden Horn needs to be demolished all the way to Taksim and this area must be reconstructed in line with a new plan;” “practically”, on the other hand, action had to be taken in this area according to a certain system of phasing and, following a series of operations, all the streets of Beyoğlu and Galata would have to be expanded in compliance with the demands of transportation and hygiene (Prost, 1937: 8). The urbanist proposed the expropriation and demolition of the upper storeys of the buildings in this quarter in the first phase, and to rebuild it according to an entirely new plan in the second phase. (Figure 6) He particularly dwelled upon the necessity of creating new settlement areas for relocating the residents of these old quarters to be transformed.

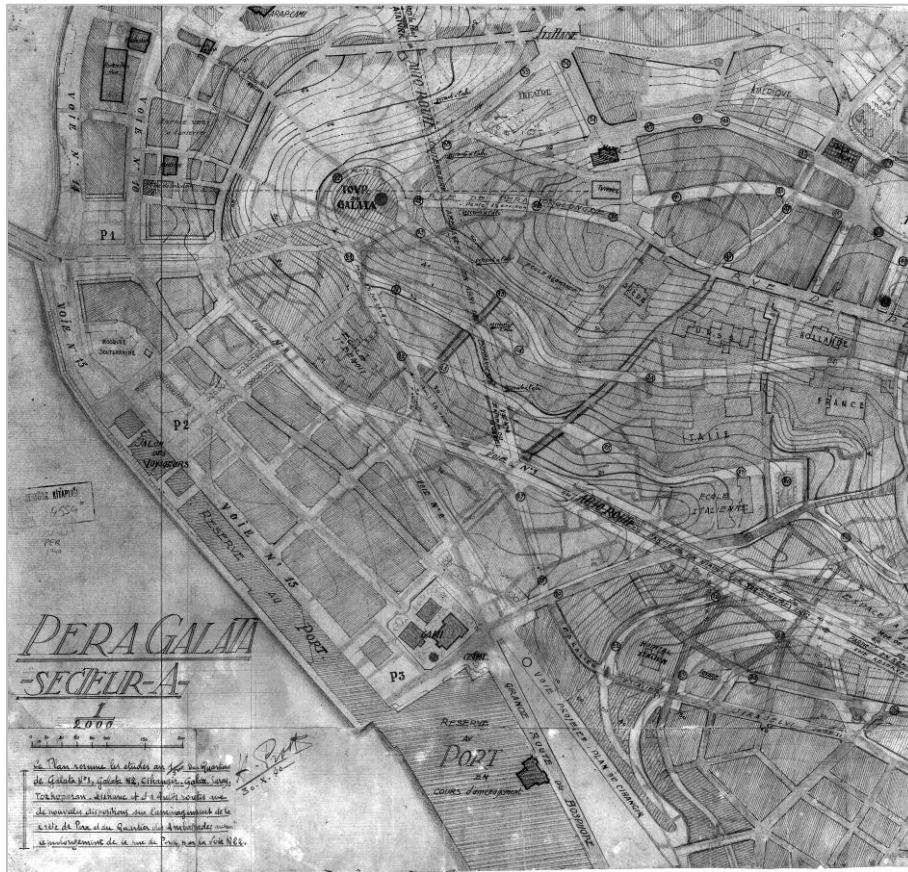


Figure 6. Transformation of Galata, detail from the Galata-Pera Plan of 1/2000 scale, dated 30.10.1940 (Istanbul Atatürk Library)

Henri Prost has been known as an advocate for the protection of the historic and natural landscapes when his career as a planner is considered in general. Yet in the case of Istanbul, he adopted a radical planning strategy that aimed at modernizing the historic fabric of the city (Bilsel, 2007). Various factors may have been at play in the French urbanist’s apparent shift in position. One of these was the fact that large areas across the old districts of

Istanbul had been destroyed by fires. A majority of these quarters remained in ruins due to the economic recession caused by years of war, while others were getting slummed. In his conference at the *Institut de France*, Prost evoked a second reason: Istanbul was undergoing a societal transformation accelerated by the reforms of Atatürk and women in particular played an important role in this transformation. According to Prost, this was the most significant reason that brought about the abandonment of the Historic Peninsula by upper-income groups in particular. He argued that “women sought comfort and better living conditions in their homes.” (Prost, 1947: 15-16) In addition to that, living in the new settlement areas was also regarded as a matter of prestige. Therefore Prost opted for modernizing the historic quarters to meet the expectations of the society. He justified his position with his personal observation of the society in Istanbul, and by the same token he displayed his support to the ongoing reforms of the Republican regime. As a matter of fact, he responded to the expectations of the Republican government to create a modern urban setting in the Western sense of the word.

In the introduction that he later wrote for *Old Istanbul*, the seventh fascicule of his compilation of planning reports, Prost seems to be concerned about explaining the reasons why he opted for the transformation of the historic fabric of the city. He asserted that after the proclamation of the constitutional regime in 1908, Istanbul was subject to substantial operations and that with the efforts of the city’s governors, the historic tissue of the city had considerably been altered already (Prost, 1939-1950: I-VII). It is interesting to read that Prost placed his Master Plan in the continuum of the modernizing efforts in Istanbul, which in fact, had a century long history that went back to the early 19th century Ottoman reform movement, the *Tanzimat* and its project of making Istanbul a contemporary European capital. As Henri Prost stated in the preface of his compilation of reports on Old Istanbul, a number of notable interventions from the early 20th century had already transformed the structure of the city.

Conservation of the monuments and the picturesque qualities of Istanbul

On the other hand, Prost played a significant role in the protection and preservation of Istanbul’s historic monuments and especially the city’s unique silhouette with the planning decisions and regulations he introduced. (Figure 7) He made a considerable effort to identify and preserve the city’s historic monuments both from the Byzantine and Ottoman periods. According to Prost, independently from their “use value,” these structures should be preserved, restored and carried into the future as “monuments” that “stand testimony to history” (Prost, 1936b). In this period, however, protection was constrained with the conservation of the monumental structures, and mostly their surroundings were opened for their display. In line with this approach, in Istanbul, Prost suggested to create open areas around the monumental structures of the city and designed the new arteries in a way to open perspective axes towards monuments, as in Haussmann’s Paris.

With the emphasis that he put on “urban aesthetics”, Henri Prost aimed at the preservation of the historic city’s silhouette as a totality. It can be said that he succeeded in achieving this goal with the height limitation –the famous 40 m. height limit– he imposed as a rule of thumb in the historic

peninsula. The concepts of “urban aesthetics” and the “preservation of the *pittoresque* integrity” which comprised of Istanbul’s natural setting and historic values, frequently appears as a principle in Prost’s reports on the planning of Istanbul’s European and Anatolian sides as well as the shores of the Bosphorus.

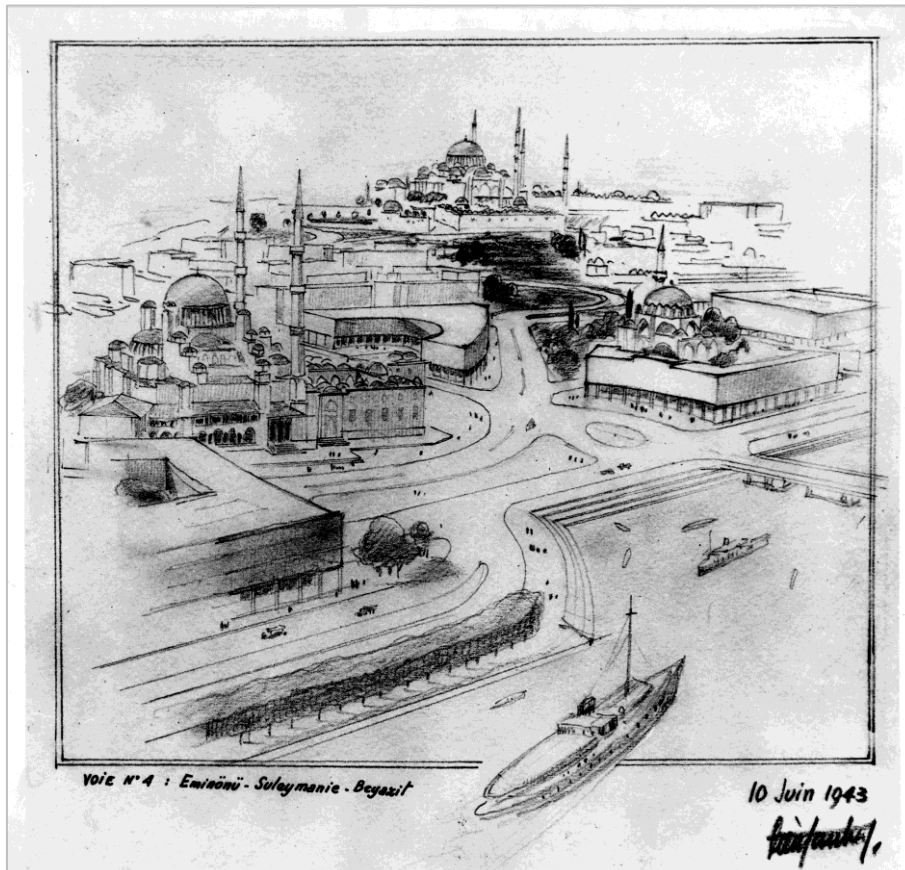


Figure 7. Project for Eminönü Square and Road no. 4 opening a new perspective toward Süleymaniye Mosque, drawn by Pierre Jaubert, Prost’s assistant, 1943, (Académie de l’Architecture/Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine/Archives d’Architecture du XX^e Siècle)

However, one could argue that Prost’s attitude toward the historical heritage of Istanbul was ambiguous. On the one hand he aimed at preserving the picturesque qualities of the site and particularly the silhouette of the city; on the other hand, he completely transformed the fabric of the city’s historic core in order to rationalize the traffic circulation in conformity with the requirements of a modern city center of the 20th century.

Conclusion

Transportation, hygiene and aesthetics were the fundamental issues that outlined Prost’s planning of Istanbul. The Master Plan for the European Side of Istanbul proposed a new road network to “vertebrate the agglomeration” – in the urbanist’s words- which meant a structural transformation. The motorways, boulevards and avenues planned to be opened or enlarged constituted the major elements of the planned transformation. The creation of public open spaces –*espaces libres*- constituted both an objective and

another tool of the urban transformation, both in spatial and social terms. These public open spaces ranging from parks and sports areas to public squares, were to be created in the existing city and across new development areas to help the citizen adopt new manners of sociability as well as a healthy environment in conformity with the principle of hygiene. Finally, urban aesthetics was a determining factor in Prost's plans at any given scale, from the Master Plan to detailed urban design projects. The local authority expected from the French planner to modernize the city's image mirroring that of a modern European city.

Henri Prost worked rather harmoniously during fifteen years with the Municipality of Istanbul, under the single party regime. However, following the transition to the multi-party regime in 1946 and the Democratic Party's victory in the 1950 general elections, the urbanist's relationship with the municipal authority changed sensibly. In 1951, Prost left his position because of speculative pressures on urban land, stating that his directives as a planner were not respected anymore. But also, the critiques from the professional circles and the press became quite influential on the local government in this period. In the meantime, a chair of city planning had already been constituted at the Faculty of Architecture in the Istanbul Technical University. Besides the German school of *Städtebau*, the British survey methods were introduced in the teaching of planning in Turkey. In this context, Henri Prost's comprehensive yet intuitive planning practice in Istanbul was severely criticized by the Turkish architects and planners. The population increase gained a new pace with the growing immigration from rural areas to the city in the 1950s; therefore the main problematique of planning was not merely modernization anymore, but to cope with a rapid urban growth from 1950s onwards. Nevertheless, Prost's Master Plan seems to have inspired the large scale urban operations that were undertaken by the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in 1957. Unfortunately, these operations lacked the sensibility of Prost's detailed urban design projects, and they were implemented without taking necessary measures to relocate the inhabitants of the expropriated areas, measures that the urbanist had dwelled upon yet insistently.

Henri Prost's master plans were put into implementation in Istanbul through a series of urban operations that the planner had indicated. He personally supervised the execution of a number of his projects, such as the opening of Atatürk Boulevard and Refik Saydam Avenue, the widening of Eminönü Square, the creation of the İnönü Esplanade in Taksim and that of the Park no. 2 including the construction of the cultural and sports facilities in the park. Besides these urban projects that were implemented during the urbanist's stay in Istanbul, Prost's master plans had long lasting effects on the city's structural transformation. They apparently constituted a reference for the large scale urban operations undertaken both in 1950s and later in 1980s in particular.

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Notes

- ⁱ The present article is based on the archival research that I have conducted from October 2004 to February 2005 at the *Cité de L'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Centre d'Archives de l'Architecture du XX^e Siècle*, which holds the personal archives of Henri Prost that were donated to *Académie d'Architecture*. The research in question has been endorsed by the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA) as part of a Post-Doctoral Research Grant Program following its initiation in the framework of the bilateral program "Bosphore" by TÜBİTAK and EGIDE (France). The research project entitled, "Preparation of an Inventory and documentation on the planning work of Henri Prost in Istanbul (1936-1951)" was conducted by Prof. Dr. Stefanos Yerasimos, Dr. Cânâ Bilsel, Dr. İpek Akpınar and Prof. Dr. Pierre Pinon.
- ⁱⁱ "Law proposal drafted for the competition to be held to select the Master Plan for Istanbul", dated 8/2/1933. Turkish Republic Directorate of the Archives of the Prime Ministry-Republic Archives (file: 835, source code: 30.1.0.00, location no: 81.533.5).

- iii *L'Institut Français d'Architecture, Centre d'Archives du XX^e Siècle* (Center of Archives for 20th Century Architecture) and the Archives of the *Académie d'Architecture*, (IFA/AA, Fonds Prost, HP.ARC.30/43).
- iv Note written by Turkish Ambassador to Paris Suad Davas to the Governor of Seine on 13 December 1933 and the note Henri Prost wrote to the Ambassador on 19 January 1934. (IFA/AA, Fonds Prost, HP.ARC.30/43).