

Designing negotiation: Osep Saraf's Şişli Culture and Trade Center

Esra KAHVECİ^{1*}, Pelin YONCACI ARSLAN²

¹ kahveci@itu.edu.tr • Department of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Türkiye

² pyoncaci@metu.edu.tr • Department of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye

**Corresponding author*

Received: September 2023 • Final Acceptance: October 2024

Abstract

In 1988, Minoru Yamasaki Associates won an invited design competition for the Şişli Culture and Trade Center in Istanbul. Organized by Cevahir Group, one of Türkiye's largest civil engineering companies at the time, the competition aimed for "a prestigious business center" to be co-owned by the company and the city municipality. Senior associate Osep Saraf, an Armenian architect from Istanbul who had been working at Yamasaki since leaving Türkiye in 1980, played a pivotal role in the project's design and revision. His expertise and understanding of local links between architectural production and financialization were instrumental in the project's success. Saraf significantly redesigned the winning entry, utilizing a flexible plan that could be realized in phases and function even if left incomplete. He transformed the initial two-tower scheme, proportionally shared by the part-owners, to be resilient to potential conflicts of interest, budget cuts, or unforeseen conditions familiar to local architects in Türkiye. This article examines Saraf's postmodern design approach as an act of "negotiation" that constructs a postmodern operative space between the global architecture firm, the Turkish construction company, and local practitioners. It also constitutes a unique design strategy appropriating conventional corporate systemization to respond to the unstable socioeconomic conditions of a so-called developing country. Drawing from the architect's archives and memoirs, recorded in an online interview during COVID-19, this study narrates the design process of the Şişli Culture and Trade Center—later transformed into today's Cevahir Shopping Mall—as a dynamic conversation between local and global forces in architecture.

Keywords

Architectural competitions, Corporate architecture, Design process, Design(ing) negotiation, Osep Saraf.

1. Introduction

In 1988, Cevahir Group, an established company in 1970s Türkiye, and the Municipality of Istanbul announced an invited (i.e., limited) architectural competition for a new trade center in Şişli, Istanbul's newly developing central business district. The competition brief called for "a prestigious business center" to create a landmark and add "symbolic value" to the city's heart. The winning project was planned to be built by Cevahir Group with a flat-rate system on 64,000 m² of land owned by the Istanbul Municipality, previously used as a bus garage by Istanbul Electric Tramway and Tunnel Establishments (IETT) [1]. All parties were required to comply with competition regulations established by the Ministry of Public Works. The sponsors favored the limited competition and invited twenty national and international firms with strong track records. Seventeen groups accepted the invitation and worked on their proposals for six months. Each group received a payment of 15,000 Turkish Lira to cover expenses – marking the first time such an allowance was granted in architectural competitions in Türkiye [2]. Ownership of the project was divided, with 51% held by the Istanbul Municipality and 49% by the developer, Cevahir Group. Thus, the required program was structured accordingly: 50% of the enclosed area was to be designed as office space, 40% as shopping areas, and 10% as a co-owned 5-star hotel.

Anyone familiar with the contemporary Turkish architectural scene at the time would have realized that this competition was exceptionally different. It was co-sponsored by a mayor known for his ambitious urban renewal projects and a major construction firm that guaranteed to build and manage the selected proposal. Mayor Bedrettin Dalan had implemented an extensive urban regeneration program in Istanbul since winning the 1984 municipal election, the first held following the 1980 military coup. He pursued aggressive initiatives, invasive infrastructure projects, and massive urban demolitions to situate the city within the global economy of the 1990s. Dalan must have been particularly willing to conduct an in-

ternational competition for a complex, high-budget project on a challenging, municipally owned site. Consequently, his administration claimed an active role in the competition and design process. As the city's mayor, Dalan was to serve as the selection committee chair and choose the jurors. The jury included Prof. Süha Toner, rector of Yıldız Technical University; Prof. Gündüz Özdeş, a prominent member of Istanbul Technical University's City and Regional Planning Department; Prof. Müfit Yorulmaz, an expert in building science and the restoration of historical buildings at Istanbul Technical University; Prof. Muhteşem Giray, an architecture professor from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University; and two structural engineers, Eser Tümen from STFA, a principal international contractor from Türkiye, and Veyssel Özoğuz from Cevahir Group. Notably, all three architecture schools in Istanbul were represented by at least one faculty member, and the corporate sponsors shared the last two spots.

The competition's corporate sponsor, Cevahir Group, had begun financing and developing its own local projects after achieving significant success as a contractor company in Libya and Saudi Arabia. For them, the competition was primarily about prestige. As explained by M. Sarfatti Larson, the most evident value of architectural competitions to the corporate sponsors lies in the myths surrounding the whole process: "The competition in itself helps turn the desired building into a monument before the fact: Publicity and public-ness, the fact of being public, become an integral part of the project's extraordinary symbolic essence" (1994, p.478). Remarkably, at the press launch (Figure 1), Dalan stated that this project would provide an opportunity to reuse the derelict IETT garage site, which was recently transferred to its new building in İkitelli (Istanbul's newly established industrial area), and most importantly, to leave a lasting mark on the city's architectural landscape while providing funding for the municipality: "The main reasons for us to build this facility are to mark our era, to respond to the social and cultural needs of the region, to contribute

to the trade and cultural life of Istanbul, and to ensure that money enters the municipality's purse." ("Şişliye Dev Proje", 1988, p.10).

These telling terms of the mayor underlined not only the intertwined motives attracting both parties but also generated massive publicity, allowing Cevahir Group to present themselves as 'patrons of architecture,'— despite the fact that a culture and trade center, as an architectural typology obtained through competitions, was an unexplored territory in Türkiye back then. From the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, government-sponsored competitions asked for the design of cultural centers only, not a combination of culture and trade. Notable examples include the 1981 Ankara Atatürk Cultural Center Competition, the 1984 Eskişehir Cultural Center Competition, the 1991 Ahlat Selçuklu and Konya Mevlana Cultural Center Competitions, and the 1992 Nevşehir Hacıbektaş-ı Veli Cultural Center Competition. As underlined by Sayar (2004), these competitions paved the way for the diversification of the competition environment in terms of architectural language. In parallel to the economic, political, and cultural developments, the winning projects "abandoned the International Style and replaced it with frameworks such as history, culture, and tradition to strengthen the image of the building" (Sayar, 2004). There were a few trade center competitions - 1984 İzmir Basmane Tourism and Trade Center, 1986 Samsun Municipality Trade Center, and 1989 Kuşadası Municipality

Trade and Social Center. Among these, the 1984 Basmane competition was the closest precedent to such a complex program, with a brief requiring a congress center, a 5-star hotel with 1,000 beds that could work together with or separately from the congress center, a commercial venue that would serve the domestic and foreign markets, and a parking lot for 500 cars [3]. Despite the 5-6 storey buildings around the Basmane area, there were no height limitations as long as the neighboring boulevard remained open to traffic. The local administration never realized the winning project, but it constituted the only contemporary program from the 1980s comparable to the Şişli Culture and Trade Center.

2. And the winner is...

By the deadline of around six months, seventeen out of twenty invited offices registered, and fourteen submitted completed entries, including renowned Turkish architects Vedat Dalokay, Melih Bırsel, Sevinç Hadi, Doruk Pamir, and Necati-Mine İnçeoğlu, among others [4]. The selection process was rigorous, with the jury evaluating the proposals based on architectural merit, feasibility, and adherence to the competition brief. In the first round, the jury eliminated Yapılar+Sage & Betrek Behnesh Group's project as it was not conforming to the requirements, while Özkan İşler's entry was disqualified due to late submission (Uzun, 2004). All proposals included several office towers, a hotel, and a retail center around a central plaza, often perpendicular to Büyükdere Street, the main avenue. According to the jury report, two separate entries by Sevinç Hadi and her team, the proposals by Necati-Mine İnçeoğlu and Doruk Pamir were eliminated due to the exceeded gross floor area (GFA) ratios and the lack of adequate infrastructure and service facilities. In the subsequent evaluation stages, the jury favored projects with two or fewer towers over those with symmetrical multiple-tower schemas, citing site-specific urban concerns. The document continued with a commentary on how such a reappraisal of the municipality's site will contribute to



Figure 1. Bedrettin Dalan at the press launch, *Milliyet*, June 17, 1988.

regional development - not surprising if one considers the jury's organic relationship with the public office [5]. The following note, however, highlights a critical point on how the program based on ownership ratios influenced the architectural form:

"The formal language of most entries was highly influenced by the brief's emphasis on monumentality and image-building requirements. Besides, the quest for contextual integration, particular planning decisions reflecting the shared rates between co-sponsors, and construction scheduling in phases caused certain difficulties for the competitors."

Lastly, it is stated that three projects had "artistic qualities" in addition to the conditions stipulated in the brief. Michigan-based architecture firm Yamasaki Associates (MYA) won the competition, and the two entries by Prof. Sümer Gürel, and İbrahim Yalçın with Nikken Sekkei were purchased by Cevahir Group (Figure 2). The winning team was composed of William Ku (then President of the American Institute of Architects) as principal in charge, Osep Saraf (Senior Associate) as Project Director-Designer, Alfred A. Yee / Applied Technology Corp as Consulting Structural Engineers, Joseph R. Loring Associates - who also collaborated with Yamasaki on the World Trade Center (WTC) project - as Consulting Mechanical & Electrical Engineers, and Barton & Aschman as Traffic Consultants.

Given these rather critical comments, the final decision ensured that the winning entry met the required maximum density and development criteria set by the two sponsors. The award seemed to be presented to an 'architecturally safe' proposal - reflecting a group decision looking for a fair common ground. According to the architectural report by Yamasaki's office, the project proposed a total construction area of approximately 550,000 m² (6,000,000 sq ft) with a shopping mall of 5 storeys, two high-rise office blocks of 46 and 36 storeys, five office blocks of 17 storeys each, a hotel of 38 storeys, theater, and conference halls, sports center with tennis courts, and a parking lot for 3,300 cars [6]. In terms of spatial organization, the mixed-use scheme was developed to align with the urban characteristics of the neighborhood, locating the twin office towers along the main artery while placing the hotel at the rear, adjacent to the neighboring residential buildings.

As detailed in the following sections, what rendered this project 'safe' was not just its adherence to development constraints, but rather the resilient negotiation strategies embedded in the competition entry by Osep Saraf. He adeptly navigated both corporate global practices and local construction dynamics, making this case a compelling example of negotiation as a post-modern design act. Instead of focusing on the stylistic attributes often associ-

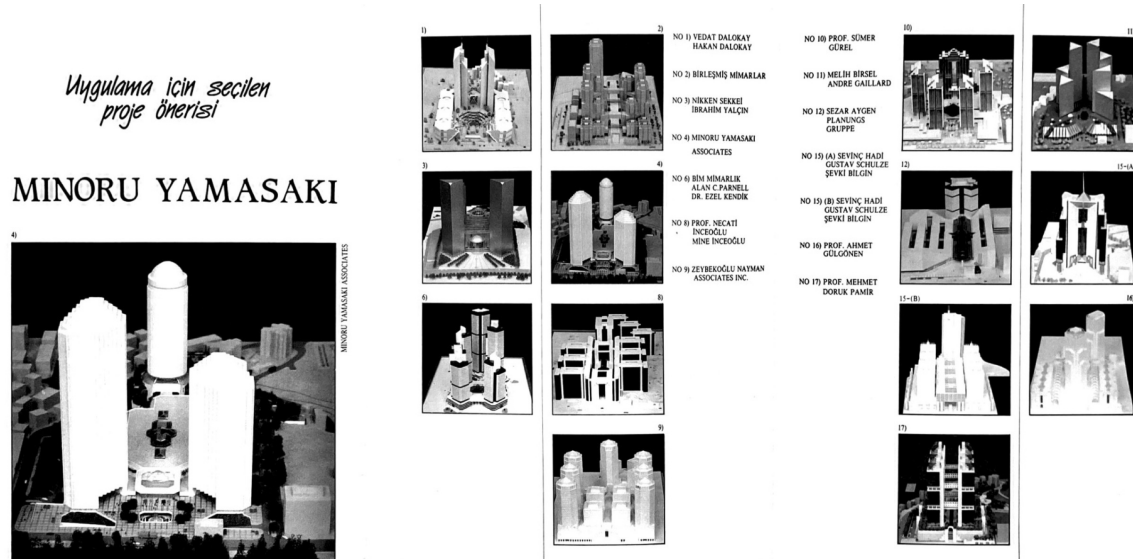


Figure 2. Announcement of the results.

"The high value of the property in this premium location requires maximum and dense development of the site while creating a special environment enhancing the business community. Marked on the Istanbul skyline, the Center will feature the tallest buildings in the city and incorporate several office towers, a vast arcade of retail shops, restaurants, entertainment facilities, and a luxury-class hotel. Key issues affecting the project's design included phasing, clear division of ownership among project elements, landmark visibility, plan flexibility, use of regional materials and building systems, site access, and circulation. Also important was the provision of public open spaces and sufficient concealed parking."

The document concludes by noting the importance of the construction phases as much as the design, underlining the winning team's emphasis on clients' arrangements [10]: "By its nature, a competition precludes much of the vital interaction with a client. However, this scheme was awarded first prize out of fifteen international submissions because it represented the clearest understanding of the client's needs for project execution, including multiple ownership, phasing, relation to the surrounding environment, municipal regulations, and prevailing construction technologies."

Between 1989 and 1992, Yamasaki's team made further adjustments to the preliminary project and submitted revised design packages in response to employers' new program requirements. As understood from these archival documents (Figure 6-7), Cevahir Group was very pleased with the completion of the preliminary design in 1989 [11] and decided to raise the design fee "with another USD 20,000 – for further future co-operation." [12].

However, the project was never realized and got lost in bureaucracy until it was ultimately transformed into a different building. What happened after the competition and how the Şişli Culture and Trade Center evolved into today's Cevahir Shopping Mall deserves a prologue introducing the exceptional Japanese-American architect Minoru Yamasaki and his chief designer Osep Saraf.

3. One architect's struggle is another's paradise

Recently called "America's most famous forgotten architect" (Kidder, 2021, p.1), Minoru Yamasaki established himself as a major figure in American architecture during the 1950s. He developed an architectural philosophy of modernism differing from the 'glass boxes' of his contemporaries and explored viable alternatives to modernist canons. Having faced anti-Japanese discrimination like many

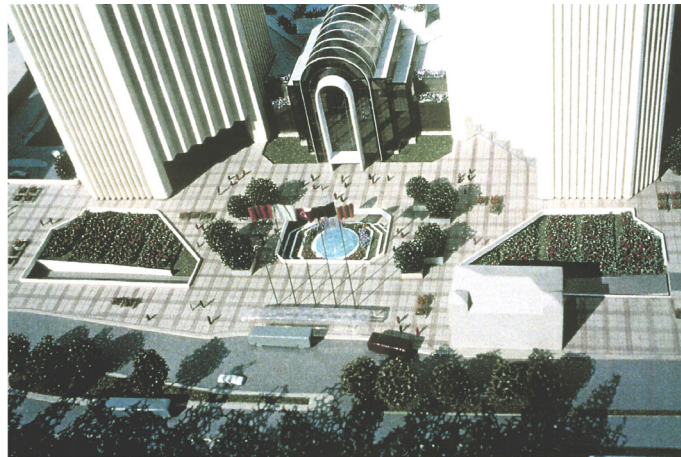


Figure 4. Model photo. Courtesy of Mert İşler personal archive.

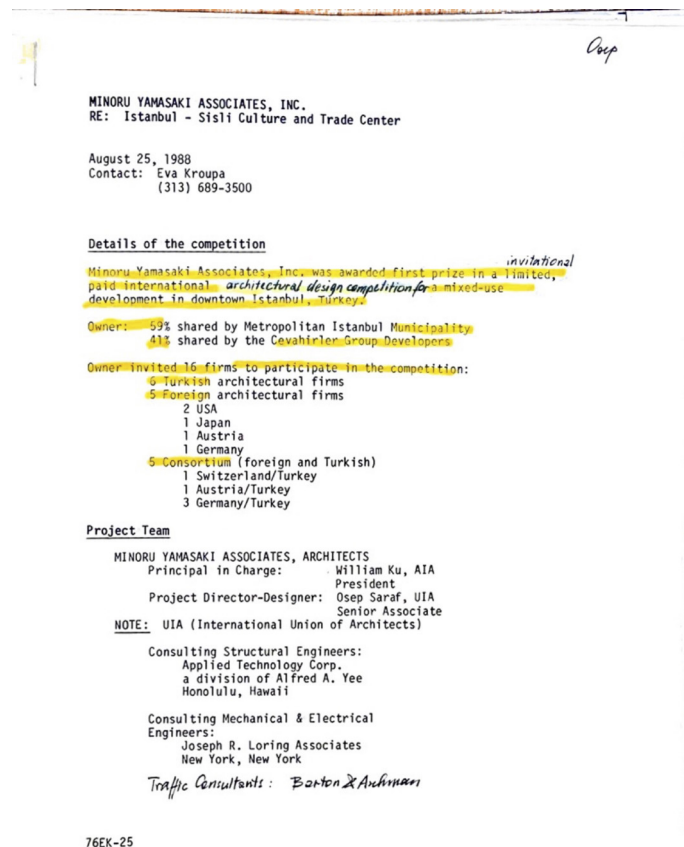


Figure 5. Details of the competition, August 25, 1988. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

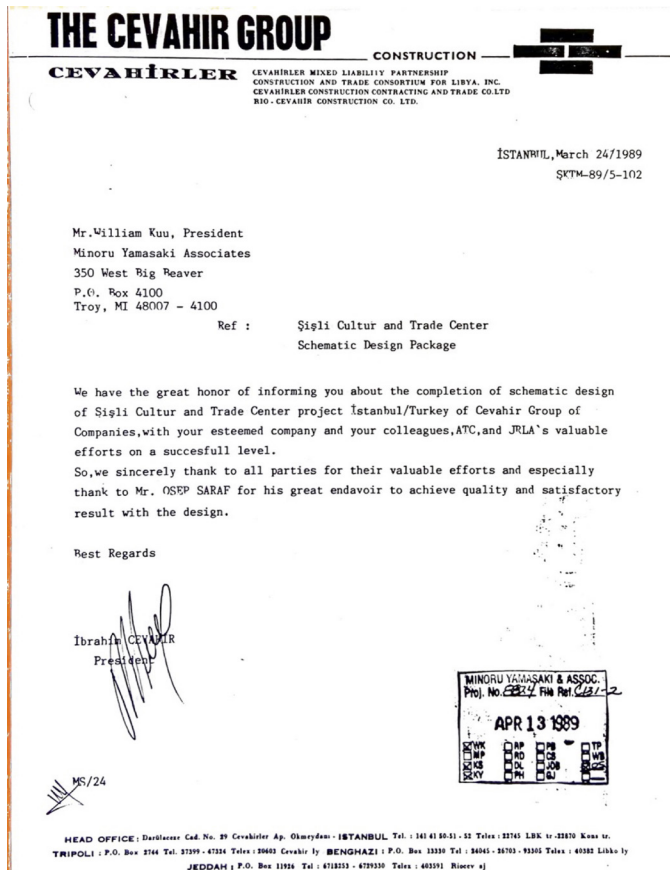


Figure 6. Letter from Ibrahim Cevahir to Yamasaki Associates, March 24, 1989. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

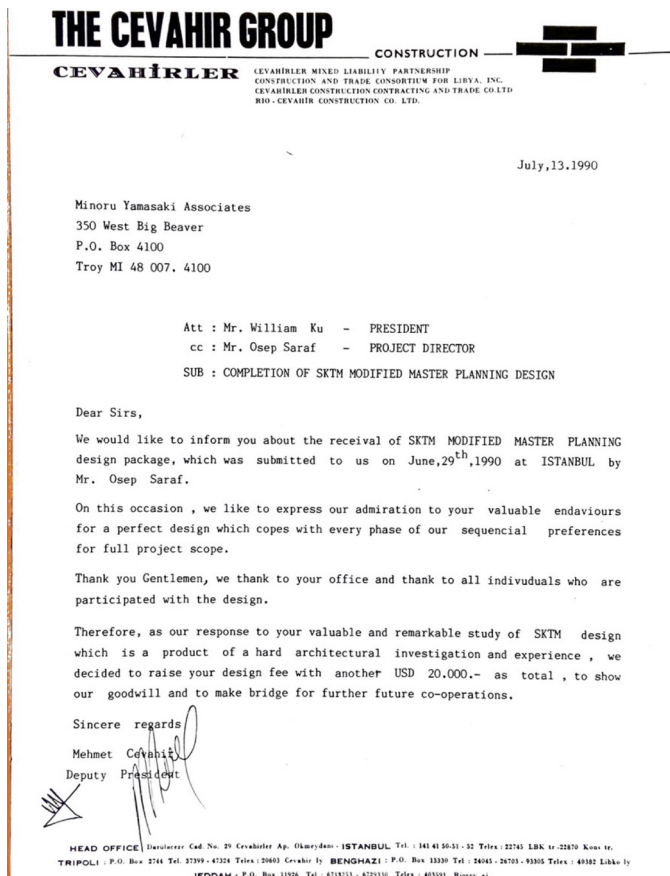


Figure 7. Letter from Mehmet Cevahir to Yamasaki Associates, July 13, 1990. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

other Japanese immigrants during World War II, he sought a humanistic approach to modern architecture, evolving from a concern for the users' emotional and sensory experiences to a passion for "serenity, surprise, and delight." Architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable described his work in a 1962 *New York Times* article: "The work [...] is so characteristic of its designer that it could be picked out as Yamasaki's in any simple guessing game," she wrote. "There are pools and plants, skylights and courts, domes, vaults, arches, arcades, canopies and colonnades. Materials are sumptuous; surfaces are intricate. These are exotic, elaborate designs intended to delight the senses." (Huxtable, 1962, p.265). Despite a portfolio of over 250 buildings, Yamasaki's fame comes from the tragic destruction of his two projects: the Pruitt-Igoe and the World Trade Center. Designed as low-cost housing in St. Louis in 1955, the Pruitt-Igoe project was a spectacular failure, indicating "the death of the modern architecture," as famously stated by Charles Jencks [13]. These residential towers, commissioned by Pruitt-Igoe Neighborhood Corporation, were meant to stand as a triumph of functional architectural design. Instead, two decades of turmoil, mainly due to the lack of funds to maintain the buildings over time, resulted in the unceremonious destruction of the entire complex in 1973.

With a damaged reputation, Yamasaki remained occupied with the modernist ideas of functional efficiency, structural expression, and technological advancement, resulting in fewer distinctive designs, more generic buildings, and formulaic skyscrapers (Gyure, 2017, p.261). Yamasaki's most celebrated commission came through his collaboration with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey – an interstate agency developing and modernizing the port district to improve commerce and trade. The WTC project earned him an appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine in January 1963. Still, the project was already dismissed by its completion in 1973, barely a year after the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe had begun [14]. Yamasaki died of

cancer in 1986, long before the tragic destruction of his iconic project in 2001. Two years after his death, while the architectural world splintered into various directions and new theoretical approaches gained influence, his office continued his legacy and won the Şişli Culture and Trade Center competition with a direct reference to the master architect: “The proposal’s primary mission is to foster increased cultural and commercial exchange – a type of world trade center – as Istanbul and Türkiye enter worldwide commercial markets.” [15] The chief designer of the winning project was Osep Saraf, an Armenian architect born in 1932 and raised in Istanbul.

After graduating from Istanbul Technical University School of Architecture in 1956, Saraf designed several houses and apartment blocks in “Miesian modular style with big glass facades” (Saraf, 2003, p.40) and later won the competition for Eskişehir Sports Center in 1959 with Nişan Yaubyan, a well-known Armenian architect from Türkiye. This competition marked a breakthrough in his career: “I had celebrated for days that I became an architect and escaped financial and emotional difficulties!” (Saraf, 2003, p.41). However, the 1960 Turkish coup d’état that started a provisional military regime interrupted most architectural practices, after which Saraf went to the University of Pennsylvania on a scholarship to study at Louis Kahn’s atelier. As he explained in our interview, Saraf earned this scholarship partly due to his competition entry for the METU Campus as UPenn’s dean, G. Holmes Perkins, had previously served as a UN expert on the project.

Despite Kahn’s profound philosophical influence, Saraf declined his job offer after graduation due to financial difficulties. Instead, he joined MYA, where he reunited with Nişan Yaubyan, who had worked there intermittently between 1959 and 1970, and received overtime pay for extra working hours. Having gained a newfound respect for Mies after school and visiting his buildings in the United States, Saraf explored different aspects of both Kahn’s and Mies’ architectural philosophies while working at Yamasaki’s office:

“In America, I realized that Mies’s simple architecture taught me only grammar, but not how to write poetry. I visited all his buildings; it started to feel monotonous and numb. Louis Kahn was a fan of starting from the most complex question and sorting things out, but I believe, on the contrary, that we must start from the simplest. Yama [how they refer to Yamasaki in the office] kept saying that the idea itself is nothing; what is more important is what a person feels when he enters the volume you created. This dilemma helped me grow into the architect I am today.”

In an interview for *Mimarlık* Journal in 2003, Saraf recalls his early days at MYA, working on projects such as WTC and university campuses of Pahlavi (Iran) and Saskatchewan (Canada). He especially praised Yamasaki’s use of working models and his particular concern for aesthetic values in design, noting that he combined these principles with Kahn’s rationality (Saraf, 2003, p.41). After working for over two years, Saraf returned to Türkiye in 1963. Together with Yaubyan, he won the design competition for Okmeydanı Hospital that same year, while they were still working on the Eskişehir Sports Center project. He returned to the US in 1965 and then back to Istanbul in 1966. These repeating episodes of relocation created an unexpected and almost unique cross-Atlantic exchange. “Nişan and I were unemployed in the 1960s, had no stable income; there were only competitions.” Thus, competitions became a significant component of his oeuvre throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with numerous winning entries [16]. He designed a duplex house for four siblings as one of his earliest commissioned projects, the Kumburgaz summer house (1969). For each of them to benefit from the beach equally, Saraf interpreted the modern house with three levels - services on the beach floor, living spaces on the ground floor, and bedrooms on the top floor. He designed the lounge opening to the terrace with folding doors and connected the terrace to the beach with a separate staircase for bare feet (Saraf, 2003, p.41). However, during our interview, he expressed his belief that he had failed to relate the house to the lo-

cal context: "My connection with history was insufficient; I could not create Turkish architecture." Yet, as he worked on many government buildings (either solo or in collaboration with Nişan Yaubyan and Güntekin Aydoğan), he gradually became a local architect specializing in the nuts and bolts of construction and management. Partly referring to multiple hospital projects he worked on during the 1970s, Saraf declares:

"There is no maintenance in Türkiye. There is no program. Some architects only design programs in America. They do feasibility studies and prepare a program for the owner. Our hospital projects in Türkiye are based on thirty-year-old programs. Nobody talks to the user. When the chief physician changes, everything changes all over."

In 1980, as Türkiye underwent yet another military coup, Saraf immigrated with his family to Michigan and was offered a position at the Minoru Yamasaki Association, where he worked as a vice president until his retirement in 1994. By the time he took on the Şişli Culture and Trade Center competition, he knew that the US chapter was formative in his career, and he needed to transfer this knowledge somehow to Türkiye:

"During my stay in Istanbul, I started to think that I could contribute to Türkiye with American "know-how" and technology as an architect who knows the uncertainty and irregular conditions of the building industry here in Türkiye. With a desire to create works in my homeland, I started participating in international architectural competitions in Türkiye as an associate from MYA and became successful in winning. Of course, the American architectural office's competitive advantage and wide resources greatly contributed to my success."

Reading contemporary architectural magazines makes one believe that Yamasaki Associates' winning design was highly praised and scheduled for completion in five years. *CAM Magazine* (Construction Association of Michigan) named the project "an exotic design with office towers and a hotel surrounding the perimeter of a central multi-level retail mall." ("Exotic design," 1988, Highlights section, para.3). On August 31, 1988, *Oakland Press*

announced that the office had "won an undisclosed cash prize" to design and build "the largest commercial development in Turkey" ("Troy Architects," 1988). This was the first time Osep Saraf was publicly identified as the project's chief designer. In another interview for *ENR* magazine, Saraf explained his addition of a city park to the project, which included "lavish fountains and gardens, which Turkish people love." ("Towers to top," 1988, p.22). He hardly hid his enthusiasm and called Türkiye "an open market much like Hong Kong ... a builder's paradise."

"I won the competition because I designed the project like a local architect. Architects from Türkiye submitted projects like the Americans, all filled with dreams... I was selected for submitting the most appropriate project for the conditions of Türkiye." [17]

While Saraf acknowledges the dynamics of local architectural practice in Türkiye, the project certainly reflects features of Yamasaki's design philosophy. Yamasaki's approach embraces harmony, balance, and humanism, integrating classical architectural elements like arches and columns into modernist structures to create serene, elegant spaces that evoke a sense of dignity and tranquility. Historically situated within New Formalism, this philosophy aligns Minoru Yamasaki with contemporaries such as Edward Durrell Stone and Philip Johnson. The adoption of geometric regularity and gleaming white facades is clearly evident in Saraf's project, as demonstrated in the early sketches by Mert İşler, who was an intern at MYA at the time (Figure 8).

On the other hand, what Saraf refers to as a "dream" in the quote above points to the difference between design and its execution. As a local architect who practiced in Türkiye for many years, he was well aware of the uncanny oscillations in the construction sector caused by the rapidly changing economy, political figures, and state policies. Since this "know-how" primarily involved managing large development projects with semi-governmental organizations and clients - as one could easily compare the Dalan & Cevahir collaboration to the Port Authority NY - and working over long periods within fluctuating

budgets, Saraf had already applied precautions during the initial design.

To deal with phasing, budget cuts, and altering ownership requirements, the architect designed the project in 'compartments,' i.e., each part was designed as an independent, self-contained package. As stated in the MYA's project report in May 1988 [18]:

"Because of the magnitude of the project and the variability of the market forces, construction will be organized in three major phases. The first phase will include the low-rise Office Buildings and the Shopping Mall. To achieve the earliest possible opening date, Phase One may be broken into three subphases. This will depend in part on market conditions. Phase Two is devoted to the construction of the high-rise Office Towers, and Phase Three completes the Hotel and Entertainment facilities. The project phasing is planned in such a rational manner that each project phase will work as an independent complex of offices, shops, garages, and services. Functional requirements for the building elements of each phase are met separately. Consecutive phases will enhance and add to the initial features of the first phase. In addition, the high-rise buildings in each phase are easily divisible between partners with the ratio of floor space and square meters being 59% and 41%." (Figure 9).

Here, the architect continuously sought alternative ways to create optimum conditions for the architectural manifestation of his original ideas and drawings. These particular exchanges elevated both the architect and the design process to a new level. Saraf acted as a translator of American corporate architecture into the local context and a mediator of its execution, adapting his design to evolving ownership, funding, and scheduling circumstances. He became a negotiator, and negotiation itself emerged as a postmodern design act, where the process became the architectural product.

4. Politics of negotiation

The project underwent major revisions over nearly two decades of negotiations and discussions between Saraf and corporate clients. A handwritten note for the budget follows the categories mentioned above with estimated costs

for each, adding up to USD 500,000,000. Saraf shares an anecdote regarding the bargain in Istanbul between Yamasaki and Cevahir, which was fairly typical in Turkish business affairs but seemed quite strange to Americans:



Figure 8. Elevation sketches. Courtesy of Mert İşler personal archive.

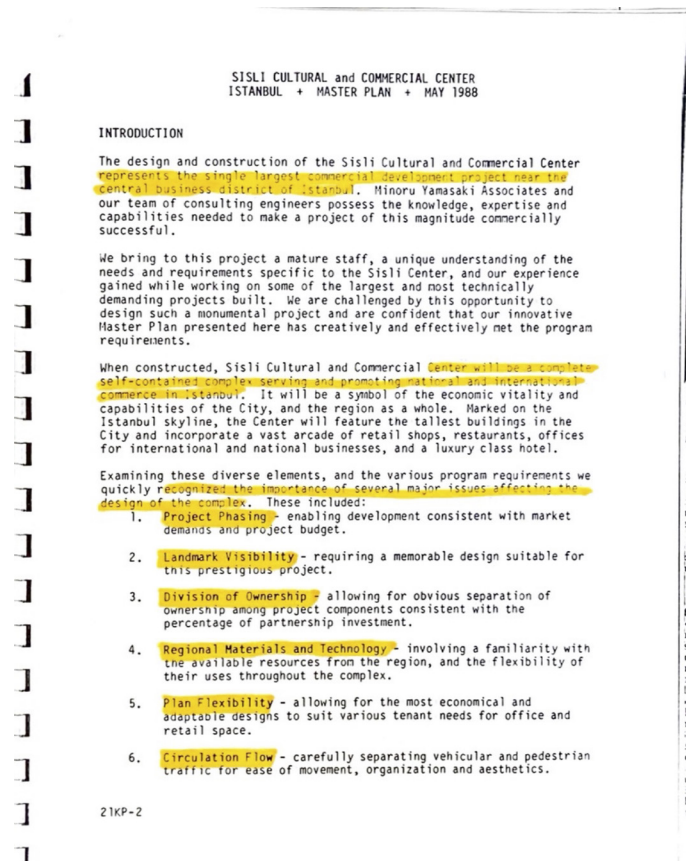


Figure 9. Şişli Culture and Commercial Center masterplan report, May 1988. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

"When 'Yama' won, he immediately threw a party. We came to Istanbul with the chief designer. Mehmet Cevahir and İbrahim Cevahir's office was in an old apartment building near Okmeydanı. The bargaining started at 20,000 dollars for the preliminary project. I said, "Let's do the contract for the preliminary project in phases." The chief designer was shocked. In the US, the usual fee is 500,000 dollars. The fee was raised to 100,000 dollars the next day. The chief designer returned to the US the following day and put me in charge. I raised our fee to 300,000 dollars in a week with my Grand Bazaar experience. The bargaining continued after I returned to the US, exceeding 400,000 dollars. The project was complete, we got our money, and I got a bonus of 20,000 dollars."

Between these bargains, the project enters a cycle of revisions, and being familiar with the dynamics of both Turkish and American contexts, Saraf knew how to navigate among them. "I came to America at the age of 48 [in 1980], so I was not an American there,"

he mentioned in the interview. According to Saraf, unlike the horizontal responsibility structure typical in US office culture, the vertical responsibility structure in Türkiye allowed him to complete the project on time by giving weekly presentations to Yamasaki's office. "It was not going to be finished with their method; I did it with my own methods," he claims. While not entirely an American there, he was also not entirely a local in Türkiye, as he collaborated and adapted to changing demands rather than resisting them. "First, the hotel was canceled. They asked how we would run a hotel together with the municipality," Saraf recalls.

"In Türkiye, such a cancellation is unacceptable; architects and contractors would object to the decision. But that seems more normal in the US, and professionals usually seek ways to deal with such major revisions. At that point, I chose to behave like an American."

As he prepared a new version of the project without a hotel, a second revision was required to reduce the height of the high-rise towers on Büyükdere Street, which were initially planned to be the tallest buildings in the city before budget constraints took precedence over symbolic value. The number of floors and square meters of the two towers differed in early press releases, reflecting a remarkable compromise between parties. Initially, the division was announced as 45 and 31 floors in the article published in *Milliyet* newspaper in June 1988, but later, the numbers were revised to 46 and 36 floors in the project report published in *Yapı* magazine in August 1988. The latter confirmed the 59% and 41% ownership ratio. Saraf explains how this ratio turned into a diagrammatic input for the project: "Towers rise according to these percentages; office buildings were also distributed according to the same percentage. I could not do it with the hotel as it was co-owned by both clients."

Soon after, the office blocks on the sides were also removed. Office correspondence reveals how the architect responded with new alternatives and continued developing the owner's new version [19]. (Figure 10).

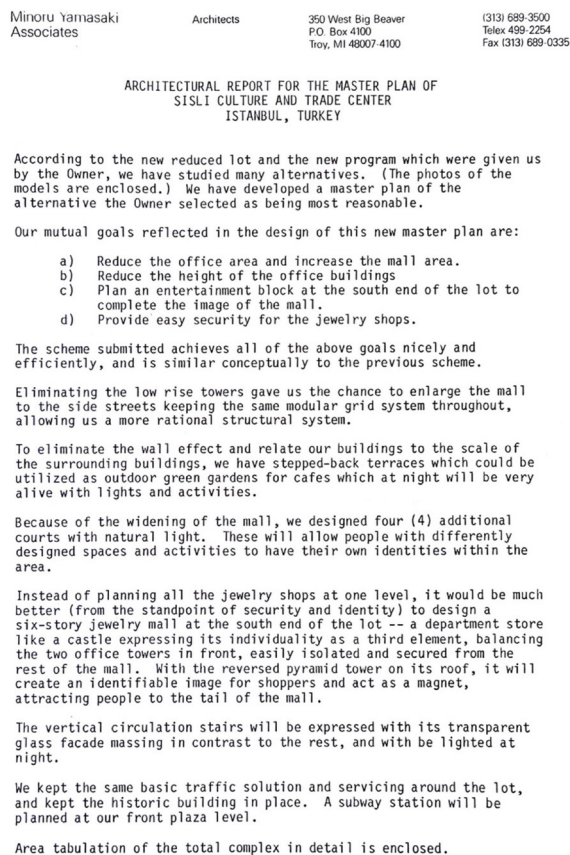


Figure 10. Architectural report for the new masterplan. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

The office area was requested to be reduced, and the mall area was expanded. In the document, Saraf refers to these alterations as an opportunity to create new spatial experiences:

“Eliminating the low rise towers gave us the chance to enlarge the mall to the side streets keeping the same modular grid system throughout, allowing us a more rational structural system. To eliminate the wall effect and relate our buildings to the scale of the surrounding buildings, we have stepped-back terraces which could be utilized as outdoor green gardens for cafes which at night will be very alive with lights and activities. Because of the widening of the mall, we designed four (4) additional courts with natural light. These will allow people with differently designed spaces and activities to have their own identities within the area.

Instead of planning all the jewelry shops at one level, it would be much better (from the standpoint of security and identity) to design a six-story jewelry mall at the south end of the lot — a department store like a castle expressing its individuality as a third element, balancing the two office towers in front, easily isolated and secured from the rest of the mall. With the reversed pyramid tower on its roof, it will create an identifiable image for shoppers and act as a magnet, attracting people to the tail of the mall.” (Architectural report,” MYA Associates, circa 1990-1992)

As hinted in this document, Saraf proposed a jewelers’ bazaar heavily influenced by the Grand Bazaar, but the idea was rejected. He then suggested a glass tower that would offer panoramic views of Istanbul and be visible from the Prince Islands. “It was rejected due to financial concerns,” he explains and continues, “Finally, I proposed it as a playground for children, but no luck! It was also rejected.” The southern end of the lot is currently occupied by Cevahir Shopping Mall’s cinema halls. Saraf considers this revision a severe mistake. Indeed, the entire new layout, transformed into a massive mall, is problematic in his view: “There is no such wide and longitudinal bazaar in the world. Also, that project lacks a magnet, a center of gravity after replacing the towers with giant inner courtyards.” Even after stepping down from his role as an architect, Saraf can’t help but wonder how he will generate alternatives.

5. Conclusion

The Şişli Culture and Trade Center’s story, a testament to the resilience of the architectural design process, began with a mayor who harbored the ambition of leaving a signature building as his noteworthy legacy and “put money into the municipality’s pocket.” (“Şişliye dev proje,” 1988). Saraf almost completely redesigned the winning entry, implementing a flexible phased plan that could function even if left incomplete. He transformed the original two-tower scheme, proportionally shared by the part-owners, into a structure resilient to conflicts of interest among shareholders, cancellation of specific programs due to budget cuts, or other unforeseen conditions familiar to local architects in Türkiye. This bold postmodern design approach was utilized as an act of “negotiation.”

This relates to the dynamics of the period on two fronts. In the 1980s, national tastes or modes of local ways of doing business disappeared since “the world’s needs and desires have been irrevocably homogenized” and “the global corporation operates with resolute constancy - at low relative cost - [...] it sells the same things in the same way everywhere [...]” as published by the American economist Theodore Levitt in the *Harvard Business Review* (Levitt, 1983, p.92-93). Soon enough, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the end of the Cold War marked a new global era, triggering a seismic shift in world affairs that transformed contemporary architectural practice.

On the other hand, following the theoretical turn of the 1970s, scholarship on architecture and the post-modern condition began to diversify the definitions of material, design, and process. According to Lavin, the “intersections between the unclaimed acts of imagination embedded within engagements with bureaucratic procedures and the complex of tools, regulations, and economies [...] shaped the conditions of possibility for the so-called genius.” (Lavin, 2020, p.23). Like the architect-developer John Portman, whose pro forma for the Bonaventure

Hotel is considered a design process itself (Denny, 2020, p.61), Saraf designed a process. The object of architecture was designed and redesigned multiple times, demonstrating remarkable resilience. Moreover, the bureaucracy and ownership dynamics, which became key design concepts in Saraf's acts of negotiation, presented a bold "post-modernization effect" within Türkiye's architectural scene.

We observe a simultaneous transformation of the architect figure as we delve into the revisions through correspondences and anecdotes - not from architectural drawings as one might expect. Through multiple phases and attempts by varying actors, Saraf produced a series of alternatives - drawing and erasing towers, narrowing and expanding shopping areas, and adapting plans - until the mall, originally envisioned as a culture and trade center, was finally built. As his name appears in resources with altering spellings of Saraf, Sarafian, Sarafyan, or Sarafoğlu, the immigrant nature of this unique figure is reflected in how he designed the design process itself. Saraf did not negotiate for the autonomy of the original project, its aura, or even the designer's authenticity. Instead, he collaborated with the unstable forces of the process and created variations of spatial organizations. In other words, with Saraf's project, the design did not construct a process toward an object - whether a drawing or a building - but replaced the object with the process itself.

The unknown history of the Şişli Culture and Trade Center reveals a postmodern conversation space in 1990s Türkiye, where the aura of the architect and the artistic work remain intact. Unlike examples of seriality and design processes examined in today's postmodern architectural discourse, this unembellished process itself is considered a postmodern interpretation of corporate intentions. In negotiating the process, Saraf assumed the role of a mediator between the global and the local, between the developer and the architect, designing the project with an embedded destruction strategy in advance, thereby restoring its manifestation.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Osep Saraf for generously offering his time for an interview and for providing access to his personal archive, and Mert İşler for sharing his architectural drawings.

Endnotes

[1] It is important to note that this article deliberately focuses on the Şişli Culture and Trade Center competition entry, not the Cevahir Shopping Mall, built in 2005 in collaboration with Turkish-British architect Can Yavuzarslan.

[2] Uzun, T. (2004). Türkiye'de Düzenlenen Uluslararası Mimarlık Yarışmaları: Tartışmalar, Skandallar, Ödüller [webpage]. Retrieved from http://www.yapi.com.tr/haberler/turkiyede-duzenlenen-uluslararasi-mimarlik-yarismalari-tartismalar-skan-dallar-oduller_95562.html

[3] Mangır, K (2021). Bir Kentin Elinden Kayıp Gitmemesi Gereken Değer: Geçmişten Günümüze Basmane Çukuru [web page]. Retrieved from <https://kalkinmaguncesi.izka.org.tr/index.php/2021/03/24/bir-kentin-elinden-kayip-gitmemesi-gereken-deger-gecmisten-gunumuze-basmane-cukuru-1/>

[4] Participants were Vedat-Hakan Dalokay, Birleşmiş Mimarlar, Nikken Sekkei and İbrahim Yalçın, Minoru Yamasaki Associates, BİM Mimarlık with Alan C. Parnell and Dr. Ezel Kendik, Prof. Necati-Mine İnceoğlu, Zeybekoğlu Nayman Associates, Prof. Sümer Gürel, Melih Birsal and Andre Gailard, Sezar Aygen Plannungs Gruppe, Sevinç Hadi with Gustav Schulze and Şevki Bilgin, Prof. Ahmet Gülgönen, Prof. Mehmet Doruk Pamir.

[5] Şişli Culture and Trade Center Design Project Jury Report, re-published by Cevahirler Group Co., 1988. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[6] As announced in *Yapı* (1988). According to *Milliyet* news clip (June 17, 1988) on the press release by Mayor Dalan, the programmatic distribution was as follows instead: high-rise office blocks of 45 and 31 storeys, five office blocks of 13 storeys each, a hotel of 30 storeys.

[7] Şişli Cultural and Commercial

Center Masterplan Report, MYA Associates, May 1988. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[8] Minoru Yamasaki Associates Inc. correspondence, August 25, 1988. 76EK-25. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[9] Minoru Yamasaki Associates Inc. correspondence, August 25, 1988. EK97-1. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[10] Minoru Yamasaki Associates Inc. correspondence, August 25, 1988. EK97-2. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[11] Letter from İbrahim Cevahir to Yamasaki Associates, March 24, 1989. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[12] Letter from Mehmet Cevahir to Yamasaki Associates, July 13, 1990. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[13] “Modern architecture died in St Louis Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32pm (or thereabouts),” claimed Jencks, “when the infamous Pruitt-Igoue scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grace by dynamite.” *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli (1977), 9.

[14] In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* Jane Jacobs criticized the preliminary plans for the World Trade Center as an act of “vandalism” against the authentic character— “the tumbled towers and jumbled jaggedness”—of Lower Manhattan. Besides their shared problematic scales with dense populations triggering debates of planning - and destructions somehow shaping the architectural discourse - both projects were commissioned by government offices, situating the architect as a negotiator between different actors.

[15] Minoru Yamasaki Associates Inc. correspondence, August 25, 1988. EK97-2. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[16] The competitions Saraf and his team were awarded include 1959 Eskişehir Sports Complex (with Nişan Yaubyay), 1963 SSK Okmeydanı Hospital (with Nişan Yaubyay and Güntekin Aydoğan), 1969 CHUV University Hospital in Lausanne (with Güneri Dutipek and Akil Gonca), 1969 Hasköy

Foundation Armenian Church, 1970 Niğde State Hospital (with NY and GA), 1971 Mersin State Hospital (with NY and GA), 1972 Erzurum University Faculty of Dentistry (with NY and GA), 1972 Erzurum University Nurse and Technician School and Dormitory (with NY and GA), 1974 Burdur State Hospital, 1988 Şişli Culture and Trade Center (M. Yamasaki Associate Office), 1989 İmar Plaza - Hotel (MYA), 1991 Menderes Airport Hotel (MYA), 1992 Camarat Bridge in Mecca (MYA), 1994 Media Center (with Luckenbach & Ziegelman Office)

[17] Osep Saraf, personal communication, February 4, 2021, via Zoom.

[18] Şişli Cultural and Commercial Center Masterplan Report, MYA Associates, May 1988. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

[19] Architectural Report for the Master Plan, JG41/37. Courtesy of Osep Saraf personal archive.

References

Denny, P.R. (2020). Pro forma for a 1,500-room convention hotel. In S. Lavin (Ed.), *Architecture Itself and Other Postmodernization Effects*, (pp. 59-62). Spector Books.

Exotic Design Wins Contract for Culture and Trade Center. (1988). *CAM Magazine*, Highlights section.

Gyure, D. A. (2017). *Minoru Yamasaki: Humanist Architecture for a Modernist World*. United Kingdom: Yale University Press.

Huxtable, A. L. (1962, November 25). Pools, Domes, Yamasaki - Debate. *The New York Times*, 265.

Jencks, C. (1977). *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.

Kidder, P. (2021). *Minoru Yamasaki and the Fragility of Architecture*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.

Larson, M. S. (1994). Architectural Competitions as Discursive Events. *Theory and Society*, 23 (4), 469-504.

Lavin, S. (2020). *Architecture Itself and Other Postmodernization Effects*. Germany: Spector Books.

Levitt, T. (1983, May). The Globalization of Markets. *Harvard Business Review*, 61 (3), 92-102. <https://hbr.org/1983/05/the-globalization-of-markets>

Şişli Kültür ve Ticaret Merkezi. (1988). *Yapı Dergisi* 81, Proje-Uygulama section, 43-52.

Saraf, O. (2003). Retrospektif. *Mimarlık* 310, 40-48.

Sayar, Y. (2004). Türkiye’de Mimari Proje Yarışmaları 1930-2000: Bir Değerlendirme. *Mimarlık* 320, 29-36.

Şişliye Dev Proje. (1988, June 17). *Milliyet*, 3,10.

Towers to top Turkey skyline. (1988, September 15). *ENR*, 22.

Troy architects win design prize. (1988, August 31). *Oakland Press*.

Uzun, T. (2004). *International Architectural Competitions in Istanbul 1916-2000*. Paper presented at the UIA 2004, Celebration of Cities.