

# Artisans Meet Design: The Reception of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office in Turkey<sup>1</sup>

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Peter Müller-Munk Associates, an American industrial design firm, established the Turkish Handicraft Development Office in 1957 in Ankara as part of the US technical assistance program to developing nations. The aim of the program was to improve selected local crafts products in order to make them appealing for the American market. To this end, American designers and local craftspeople produced about 150 prototypes formed by creative combinations of meerschaum, copperware, ceramics, woodwork and basket weaving. When the office was closed in the early 1960s because of its failure to mass-produce the samples, it left behind a lively debate regarding the improvement of craft production and its relation to industrialization and economic growth. This article focuses on these debates to determine the place allocated to design within the discussions of crafts as a socio-economic activity. The article will focus on the reception of the design assistance program among the local actors to answer how Turkish crafts practitioners and officials perceived design, how the emergent concept of design was linked with handicraft and artisanal production, and how it took place as part of the agenda of economic and industrial development.

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The technical aid programs initiated by the United States Department of State as part of the Mutual Security Program in the second half of the 1950s provided some remarkable episodes in the design histories of both aid-giving and aid-receiving countries.<sup>2</sup> The US government adopted the program as a key to development in underdeveloped regions through the improvement of small industries and craft production.<sup>3</sup> To this end, the US government commissioned proficient US design consultancy firms to supply required skills and expertise for local artisans. The journal *Industrial Design* heralded this new strategic mission of designers in successive articles entitled 'The Designer as Economic Diplomat' in August 1956 and 'Design as a Political Force' in April 1957.<sup>4</sup> As Arthur Pulos claims, the technical aid program assigned designers a new critical role in international relations by broadening their geographic reach and it also became an opportunity for the worldwide propagation of American design ideals.<sup>5</sup>

For the countries receiving assistance, the consequences in terms of design history were more ambiguous and complicated. Design aid covered Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, South Korea, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Israel, Turkey, Greece, Mexico, Surinam, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Costa Rica.<sup>6</sup> The common ground for all these economically, culturally, and socially diverse countries was their being non-industrial societies. Industrial design education and practice were either unknown or in their infancy at best. To make up for the lack of design experience, the US government took care to select American design studios qualified in the crafts.<sup>7</sup> With the collaboration of the American Society of Industrial Designers, Russel Wright Associates, Walter Dorwin Teague Associates, Design Research Incorporated, Peter Müller-Munk Associates and Smith, Scherr and McDermott were assigned to the mission.<sup>8</sup> US officials expected designers to train local craftspeople in production

techniques, management, planning, and accounting as part of a broader agenda directed at industrial development and social transformation.<sup>9</sup> Except for a few countries like South Korea and Israel, which had more favorable economic conditions, the program failed to achieve its desired outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of Turkey, Peter Müller-Munk Associates (PMMA) undertook the program along with those in India and Israel. The company's named partner Peter Müller-Munk was originally a silversmith working for Tiffany & Co. before he established the design studio in 1944.<sup>11</sup> At the time of the assignment, Müller-Munk was the president of the Society of Industrial Designers while his company was already a renowned studio in the USA, working for clients like US Steel, Dow Chemicals and Westinghouse.<sup>12</sup> As disclosed in official correspondence, the US government relied on the studio's experience in working with companies of varying sizes, and its large staff specializing in various fields, as well as Müller-Munk's own craft background.<sup>13</sup>

When PMMA representatives arrived in Turkey for the mission, they were faced with an absence of design. In the 1950s, industrial design was in an 'embryonic phase', as Alpay Er describes it, during which it was known only as a concept but not practised as an industrial activity.<sup>14</sup> Design work was restricted to projects undertaken by draughtsman or engineers in larger industries, or architects and craftspeople in smaller design-oriented ones.<sup>15</sup> As yet, there were no Turkish equivalent for the word 'design'. In Turkish translations of the technical aid documents prepared by American partners, idioms such as *sinai konstrüksyon ve desen* meaning 'mechanical construction and pattern'<sup>16</sup> or *endüstriyel planlama* meaning 'industrial planning'<sup>17</sup> were used in place of 'industrial design'. In the absence of professional designers, design institutions and even the concept of design itself, PMMA cooperated with different governmental bodies and craft and trade unions such as the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, the Ministry of Labor and the Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen.<sup>18</sup> The dialogues between American designers, Turkish bureaucrats and craft representatives largely shaped the program in Turkey. Negotiations between these parties shed light on the ways in which design made a space for itself within a socio-economically motivated craft improvement program.<sup>19</sup> In this article, I aim to disclose how Turkish officials perceived design, how they linked it with artisanal production and how they framed it within a developmentalist perspective. The analysis will derive from a critical reading of archival documents created by both parties involved in the program. Articles about the Turkish Handicraft Development Office in various design and craft periodicals, institutional publications and newspapers will complement correspondence, office memoranda, reports and bulletins prepared by American and Turkish officials. Given the characteristics of the archival sources, this article introduces a top-down conception of crafts and its relation to industrial design activity. There are scarcely any resources revealing the artisans involved in the program, their experimentations with design work and their approach to the aid. For this reason, my focus in this article is limited to official interpretations of design experience and its relation to the economic, social and cultural significance of craft production. I will explore the meaning and utility of the craft industry for development strategies and the potentials and limitations of that conception in the progression of technical aid.

## Crafts for Development

The issue of handicrafts found a healthy interest in the economic and political agenda of 1950s Turkey. The period was marked by the liberal and democratic transformation of Turkey nationally, and the emergence of a new post-war world order globally. In

1946, Turkey switched to multiparty politics, which resulted in the Democrat Party (DP) taking over the government in the elections of 1950. As a right-wing political party, the DP's rule stimulated the ongoing liberalization of Turkey's economy and the country's alignment with the west. Expansion of free trade in the growing capitalist markets, and incentives for foreign experts, accelerated Turkey's shift to the foreign market and import-oriented policies and opening the country to foreign, particularly American, investment and assistance.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, Turkey began to receive aid from the Marshall Plan in 1948 and participated in NATO in 1952, strengthening bridges with the USA.<sup>21</sup>

The Marshall Plan was an extension of the US policy aiming at providing economic welfare and political stability worldwide, with a focus on the recovery of European nations after the Second World War.<sup>22</sup> In 1949, the geographical reach of the US assistance was extended, under the name of the Point 4 Program, to cover developing or underdeveloped Middle Eastern, Asian and African countries.<sup>23</sup> The Point 4 Program gave weight to sharing 'technical knowledge' in the creation of local enterprises that would bring about economic growth.<sup>24</sup> As with the Marshall Plan, Turkey was included in the Point 4 Program, because American officials wanted to ensure 'continued strong Turkish support of Free World collective security, and an upward moving economy with a firm and stable foundation'.<sup>25</sup> For the USA, Turkey stood out among the other Middle Eastern nations for its potential to host free and democratic institutions that would bring about the intended economic progress.<sup>26</sup> The International Cooperation Agency (ICA), which was responsible for the execution of Point 4, believed that in order to achieve capital development in Turkey, the emphasis on agriculture and transportation in the Marshall Plan needed to be complemented with projects that would directly and immediately transform people's lives.<sup>27</sup> With this in mind, the ICA included handicraft development in its technical aid program as an extra source of income for rural populations.<sup>28</sup> The ICA spared a total amount of \$204,000 for industry-based projects and \$59,000 out of this was particularly dedicated to the 'determination of scope and skill of handicrafts with view toward acceptability of handicrafts in foreign markets'.<sup>29</sup>

America's program to improve handicrafts appealed to the long-standing attempts of Turkish authorities to enhance craft production. As the historical account of crafts and small-scale industries prepared by the Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen for the fiftieth year of the republic reveals, from the republic's establishment to DP rule in the 1950s, the issue was handled through its relation to industrialization.<sup>30</sup> Various actors, including government officials and professional craftspeople bodies, believed that crafts would not necessarily be outmoded by industrial production but would rather complement big industry in many crucial ways. Economic policies in the first two decades of the new republic were directed at the development of a national bourgeoisie that would foster national production.<sup>31</sup> The 1930s were the first period when inward-looking protectionist economic policies brought tangible results and big industry achieved remarkable growth to compensate for small-scale industry and handicrafts.<sup>32</sup> Alongside these measures, the Republican People's Party (RPP) government gave weight to financial arrangements to encourage craft production. The establishment of Halkbank in 1938, as a state-owned body to fund tradespeople and artisans, was among the most far-reaching financial resolutions offered by the state.<sup>33</sup>

When the DP came to power it took over the early republican approach to crafts' relation to industrial development. After a short period of foreign market and import-oriented measures, the DP adopted import substitution industrialization (ISI) policies in 1954 to maintain growth.<sup>34</sup> Yet none of these economic measures helped big industry emerge as the driving force of national development. Turkey was still largely an agricultural country and its national production was rather dominated by small-scale and

craft production. As the industrial census conducted by the State Institute of Statistics in 1950 demonstrated, only 3.2% of the enterprises in the country were large-scale.<sup>35</sup> This being the case, supporting craft based and small-scale production maintained its importance. As disclosed in the report prepared by Celal Bayar, the third prime minister of Turkey from 1950 to 1960, during his time as the minister of economy and commerce craft production was seen as a key component to an effective economic division of labor between small-scale and large-scale production.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike during the early republican period, craftspeople gained considerable political power, which increased their significance for the DP government.<sup>37</sup> In the period between the two world wars, craft practitioners and tradesmen began to raise their voices because they felt threatened by the statist industrialization as well as the rising competition from cheap imports, changing modern consumption patterns, urbanization, and continuing financial crisis.<sup>38</sup> Particularly in sectors like weaving, shoemaking, tanning and felt-making, artisans were suffering from downsizing in their businesses through an increase in mass produced and imported equivalents of their products which were cheaper in price and more appealing aesthetically.<sup>39</sup> In order to make the voices of artisans heard and to protect their members, professional associations began to exert pressure on the government to take action, using channels available to them such as publications, petitions, and letters to the government and newspapers.<sup>40</sup> During its rule, the DP took the political power of these groups seriously and endeavoured to respond to their requests particularly through economic measures like tax regulations.<sup>41</sup>

American technical aid programs responded well to the economic and political weight attached to craft production in Turkey. In planning the handicraft development program, the ICA identified shopkeepers and artisans as the main target of the aid, considering their 'private initiative, individual creativeness, and [e]conomic wellbeing' as the key to economic and social enrichment.<sup>42</sup> US officials believed that the transformation of the 'mentality and psychology of craftsmen' through training in production techniques, management, planning, and accounting would, in turn, render it possible to create a wider effect in the society and to develop the industry.<sup>43</sup> Priority was placed on assuring the artisans that the design aid program would not threaten their control over production.<sup>44</sup> Designers were expected to focus on the division between mental and manual labour and promote themselves as 'the manufacturer's right arm at every stage of product development, from materials and product planning to production and marketing'.<sup>45</sup> In all these stages, it was deemed crucial to make use of the 'existing productive equipment, domestic resources and materials, and the local manufacture of hand tools and larger equipment'.<sup>46</sup>

To fit with the plan, the US government contracted Peter Müller-Munk Associates in Turkey to direct their know-how and workforce to 'market evaluation, product development, technical assistance in placing recommended designs into production, and marketing and distribution arrangements'.<sup>47</sup> Before Peter Müller-Munk representatives set to work, they surveyed the history and current condition of crafts in Turkey to identify the scope of the aid.

## Delineating the field

Before Paul Karlen and Robert Reanud of Peter Müller-Munk Associates arrived in Turkey for their survey, the Turkish Employment Service prepared a briefing for them.<sup>48</sup> The briefing introduced the characteristics of various craft products specific to different regions like knife-making in Bursa, tile-making in Kütahya, weaving in

Denizli and stone carving in Ağrı.<sup>49</sup> The regional crafts introduced in the briefing were long-standing craft industries. The histories of craft in Turkey follow the tradition back to sixteenth-century Ottoman guilds, by means of which the practice established its institutional as well as practical framework.<sup>50</sup> Official attempts at reviving craft production in Turkey also emphasized the Ottoman heritage to justify the economic, cultural and social importance of the craft industry. As *A Report on the Requirement and Establishment of Handicraft and Small-scale Industry Technology Center* prepared by the Turkish Employment Service of the Ministry of Labour in 1957 suggests, Anatolia was a cultural and commercial hub back in the eighteenth century owing to lively craft production as well as its location at the strategic intersection of eastern and western trade routes.<sup>51</sup> Referring to the books of orientalists such as Vital Cuinet, the report further argues that regional crafts like carpet weaving, silk weaving, felt-making, silverwork and forging were so appreciated in Europe that countries like France sent experts to the country to inquire deeper into these practices.<sup>52</sup> Yet, as the story unfolds, with the onset of industrialization in the west, crafts in Turkey gradually lost their economic importance. As stated in the report, threatened by the mass-produced cheap western goods, craft production became stuck within small local markets.<sup>53</sup>

The US technical aid program to Turkey was part of long-standing attempts to revive the craft industry in the country. Yet despite the conviction regarding the necessity of reviving the craft industry for development, the definition of the field was so vague that attempts at a solution became complicated. In the official records documenting the experience of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office, and even in the literature about crafts, there were no explicit definitions of what crafts were. Concepts like crafts, handicrafts, traditional handicrafts, artisan and even 'small-scale industry' were being used synonymously. Among these concepts corresponding to small-scale craft production, *küçük sanat*, meaning small arts, found more common use as a catch-all term. Yet, its scope was still too extensive and hence ambiguous. Governmental bodies and professional associations regulating the field made use of these diverse definitions, taking into account diverse criteria like the amount of capital and income, quality and quantity of production, and the number of employees. In the definitions adopted by the State Institute of Statistics for censuses, by Halkbank of Turkey for loaning money, and by the government for its development plans, all the fields of tradesmen, craftsmen, household industry, village industry, and small-scale industry were sometimes conflated with each other while at other times they were treated separately.<sup>54</sup> In a nutshell, *küçük sanat* referred to commercial activities which are based on manual labour, which derives a limited profit that is not sufficient to be identified as trading, and which relies on expertise and experience in the field of occupation.<sup>55</sup>

Classification of the branches of *küçük sanat* also exhibited the same kind of polysemy. The broadest categorization took into account the type of occupation, and discriminated between production, mending, service, and trade, with producers consisting of village crafts, household crafts, artisanal crafts, and small-scale industry.<sup>56</sup> In the 1957 report of the Turkish Employment Service on the necessity of the establishment of craft development centres, the categorization of *küçük sanat* was made according to the type of material each branch treated. The list comprised all the fields of occupation including cart-mending, tannery, dyeing, locksmithing, jewellery-making, carpentry, brickwork, shoe-making, weaving, copper-working, basketry, foundry, toy-making and etc.<sup>57</sup>

As for *artizan*, that is 'artisan', it was offered as a term that emphasized the quality of craftsmanship in the characterization of *küçük sanat*. Actually, Nusret Uzgören, a former president of Halkbank of Turkey and a prominent figure involved in the regulation of the cooperative system in Turkey, offered *artizan* to suggest small-scale manufacture by craftspeople.<sup>58</sup> In a similar manner, Kemal Şenel, a member of craftsmen cooperatives, characterized an artisan as 'a skillful person who is engaged in the experienced and dexterous use of modern mechanical means of production'.<sup>59</sup> Besides, Şenel also equated *küçük sanat* with handicrafts to refer to 'a type of economic activity which belongs to the creative private sector, which has the power to raise living standards, compensate for the effects of various schools of thought, increase the employment capacity, and even to present goods to foreign markets'.<sup>60</sup> Thus an *artizan* was the person engaged with *küçük sanat* who was 'both a qualified worker and an employer' with a considerable level of proficiency, expertise, and inventive creativity.<sup>61</sup> Yet, as Asım Karaömerlioğlu and Emre Balıkcı argue, the Turkish word lost the emphasis on skills and freedom but rather came to connote an 'organic community connected around common ideals'.<sup>62</sup> While in both French and English 'artisan' connotes 'independence and freedom' with a secondary emphasis on the skill involved in production, community bonds come to fore in the definition of *artizan* in the 1950s.<sup>63</sup> The conceptual disparity between *artizan* and its western counterpart 'artisan' was echoed in the way crafts practitioners regulated their relations with the state and big businesses. The foregrounding of community bonds in the Turkish term endowed *artizans* with a 'substantial societal and organizational power'.<sup>64</sup> Thus, all policies and regulations regarding the handicrafts took into account this social and economic power that *artizans* held. Measures like financial support, technical training or institutionalization of craftspeople dwelt on their potential for complementing big businesses and ensuring social harmony. Project proposals advocating the need to advance handicraft production pointed out the potential of the field to considerably increase the employment capacity of the rural population particularly, to prevent urban migration, to promote industrial development and complement big industry, and to serve as an educational institution.<sup>65</sup>

An examination committee consisting of Paul Karlen and Robert Renaud of Peter Müller-Munk Associates reached parallel conclusions after their research. Not only did these American designers consult the report of the Turkish Employment Service but they also negotiated with representatives from the government and the state, the chambers of commerce, organizations of craftspeople and tradesmen, businessman and artisans in order to get a picture of the design quality, production techniques and marketing in the handicraft industry.<sup>66</sup> The designers' trip was organized with the collaboration of the Turkish Ministry of Economy and Commerce and the US Operations Mission to Turkey.<sup>67</sup> During the twenty-two days of their visit, they travelled to many cities and villages across Turkey, including Ankara, Hacibektaş, Kayseri, Nevşehir, Adana, Antakya, Gaziantep, Konya, Isparta, Burdur, Denizli, İzmir, Demirci, Kütahya, Eskişehir, Bursa, Umurbey, İstanbul, Kartal, Bolu, and Amasra.<sup>68</sup> During this extensive field trip they analyzed the production techniques, materials, and equipment utilized in prominent regional crafts like carpet weaving, basketry, spoon-making, stone carving (particularly meerschaum and alabaster), knife-making, silversmithing, coppersmithing, furniture, woodwork, leathercraft, and tile making.<sup>69</sup>

At the end of the survey, Karlen and Renaud concluded that in a country like Turkey, whose economy is based on agricultural production rather than industry, handicrafts and small-scale industry should be developed to complement the agricultural activity. In other words, designers expected that through the development of handicrafts in

Turkey, rural unemployment would be prevented and hence people's living standards would increase.<sup>70</sup> The designers from Peter Müller-Munk Associates positioned handicrafts as a solution that would allow farmers to earn their keep without leaving their villages during the times of the year when no agricultural production was possible. Increasing the employment opportunities was the first of the two main objectives of the proposed project for Turkey. The second was to increase the flow of foreign currency through both a rise in exports and a decline in imports.<sup>71</sup> Within the context of the handicraft development project, this meant making effective use of available materials and enhancing the sales appeal of local crafts. Although this meant developing products for both domestic and foreign markets, the priority was in the development of craft objects for exports.

Karlen and Renaud justified the need to develop handcrafted products through the rising global demand for genuine artisan products. Designers asserted that the 'brightness, sleekness and inordinate excellence' of machine aesthetics had already lost its charm and people were now in search of products that were labeled as handmade.<sup>72</sup> Besides, they underlined, consumers prefer the traces of imperfection and the artlessness of products crafted from natural materials to the carbon-copied industrial products available everywhere.<sup>73</sup> The survey they conducted in Turkey convinced the designers that the country had sufficient resources and labour force to meet such a demand. Yet they also observed that available artefacts suffered from undistinguished aesthetic quality and lack of creativity.<sup>74</sup> In an interview that Renaud gave to a local newspaper in his return to America, he complained that artefacts crafted by different artisans had no distinctive qualities other than the quality of workmanship.<sup>75</sup> Thus, designers believed that product innovation through design was required for the success of the project. Referring to the Swedish furniture and Finnish lamps which were in great demand in the US market, Renaud and Karlen urged upon the importance of creating new forms and ideas that would respond to the needs of consumers, the innovative combinations of materials, and appropriate marketing attempts.<sup>76</sup>

As a consequence of all these observations and studies, Peter Müller-Munk Associates representatives established the Turkish Handicraft Development Office on 27 June, 1957 in Ankara in cooperation with the Turkish government.<sup>77</sup> The office was co-directed by Robert Renaud of Peter Müller-Munk Associates and Mehmet Ali Oksal of the Turkish government.<sup>78</sup> Another Peter Müller-Munk Associates designer, Robert Gabriel, worked at the office with a Turkish staff of six to eight people.<sup>79</sup> To produce the objects designed in the office, fifteen cooperatives were formed in cities like Kütahya, Konya, Antep, and Eskişehir.<sup>80</sup> American designers gave priority to creating modern interpretations of peculiar Turkish motifs and materials to create objects that would appeal to western taste.<sup>81</sup> For the initial step, the office concentrated on the production of functional objects created by innovative combinations of ceramics, wood, basketry, meerscham (a soft clay mineral peculiar to Eskişehir of Turkey), and copper. Products varied from lamps made of copper and straw to wooden coffee tables decorated with tiles or folding tables with copper tops; from table accessories combined with straw to vases, baskets, pipes, and screens (see **Figures 1** and **2**).<sup>82</sup> Most of these objects produced in the office were shaped by prevalent modern aesthetics. Reinterpretation of traditional crafts objects for western markets required adapting them to the simple, unadorned and minimal formal language of modern design. The intention to mechanize the production of artefacts also called for a reinterpretation of forms in straight, geometric lines. Thus, designing came to be the process of blending the traditional local materials, colours, patterns, and figures with simple modern forms and practical functions. Herein, the vernacular functioned as a design concept that would mark the



**Fig 1.** Products of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office. Photo © Yeditepe Üniversitesi Nejat Diyarbakirli Koleksiyonu ve Görsel Arşivi



**Fig 2.** Products of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office. Photo © Yeditepe Üniversitesi Nejat Diyarbakirli Koleksiyonu ve Görsel Arşivi

products as being formally similar to their western counterparts. In other words, design was taken as a means of product branding as much as form-giving. The favoured brand identity was inevitably the local character, the so-called traditional essence of a long-established culture.

In the first Productivity Conference organized by the Turkish Economic Association, Institute of Economic Research in 1958, Mehmet Ali Oksal cited the work of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office as an opportunity to call attention to the issues of creativity and product aesthetics that had been neglected to date.<sup>83</sup> As Oksal argued, the previous attempts at developing crafts in Turkey suffered from a very limited focus on



research and development.<sup>84</sup> He presented the office with a manifesto detailing the need to focus on market research, product innovation, marketing and to improve artisans' artistic skills.<sup>85</sup> Oksal was not alone in his insistence on the requirement to focus on the formal and stylistic qualities of traditional crafts. Once the office's work made its debut in Turkey, it triggered a debate on the mediocrity of craftwork, and particularly tourist souvenirs.

## Review of the office's work

Turkish Handicraft Development Office representatives organized a press conference to introduce the prototypes to the public in October 1957 with the participation of Peter Müller-Munk himself. As reported in the weekly journal *Akıs*, the exhibit stood out as an inspiring example of how to differentiate traditional artefacts through the creative use of available local materials, techniques, and skills.<sup>86</sup> Visitors were impressed by the level of creativity and the design quality of products and regretted that this could not be achieved before then. According to Oksal, the reason behind this was that the conventions of craft production in Turkey depended on repetition and mimicry of the same models.<sup>87</sup> As he emphasized, the division of labour between the creativity of the trained applied artist and the artisan's manual dexterity never materialized and therefore craftspeople continued to produce the same standardized products for years. The products of the office stood as testaments to how various objects could have been created out of Kütahya tiles other than the usual wall plates, or how a merely decorative Konya spoon could be transformed into a modern and useful pair of salad tongs.

The Office's products made another debut in the Turkish Handicrafts Exhibition organized by The Travel Association of Turkey between 4 October and 1 November 1958 in Istanbul. The association, established in 1949, was dedicated to the promotion of Turkey abroad and the exhibition was planned as a step towards this aim.<sup>88</sup> The curator of the exhibition Nejat Diyarbekirli expected that the event would provide a chance to 'promote the Turkish taste at home and abroad, to orient domestic mass production, and to pick samples to be produced as tourist souvenirs'.<sup>89</sup> With this intention, products of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office were brought together with thousands of artefacts collected from various villages and provinces (see **Figures 3–5**).

The reaction to the exhibition was enthusiastic. National and local newspapers gave wide coverage to the exhibition through both news and commentary. The newspaper *Vatan* announced the opening along with a picture of office's products, mentioning the design aid project conducted by Peter Müller-Munk Associates.<sup>90</sup> There was no other news dedicated specifically to the Turkish Handicraft Development Office, but the general commentaries on the exhibition were also applied to the specific case of the Development Office. Almost all of the articles dwelt on the importance of the exhibition in terms of the cultural representation of Turkey. The exhibited pieces were mostly appreciated as potential tourist souvenirs. The article published in *Akıs* evoked the propagative role of souvenirs and underlined that one of the main concerns of the exhibition was to inspire 'products with a better Turkish feel'.<sup>91</sup>

A truthful representation of Turkishness by the handicrafts was a shared concern among critics. Yaşar Yeniceci, a painter and art columnist writing in *Vatan*, believed that showcasing the best examples of handicrafts would not only bring about a trading profit but also enhance the country's perception in the west.<sup>92</sup> He was complaining about how for ages the west had overlooked the accomplishment of Turkey in handicrafts, subsuming the rich repertoire of artefacts belonging to Turkish culture under the



**Fig 3.** Turkish Handicrafts Exhibition. Photo © Yeditepe Üniversitesi Nejat Diyarbekirli Koleksiyonu ve Görsel Arşivi



**Fig 4.** Turkish Handicrafts Exhibition. Photo © Yeditepe Üniversitesi Nejat Diyarbekirli Koleksiyonu ve Görsel Arşivi



**Fig 5.** Turkish Handicrafts Exhibition. Photo © Yeditepe Üniversitesi Nejat Diyarbekirli Koleksiyonu ve Görsel Arşivi

umbrella of oriental or Islamic arts. To correct this misapprehension, it was necessary to carefully foreground the specific design, form and colour characteristics of authentic Turkish handicrafts. Thus, the intention was to produce and exhibit handicrafts that would present the 'grace and artistic value of the originals'.<sup>93</sup> He welcomed the exhibition as a responsible attempt to achieve this end. In the newspaper *Şehir*, the journalist and novelist Azize Bergin proudly announced that the exhibition presented an opportunity for both Turkish youth and tourists to discover the most decent examples of Turkish handicrafts.<sup>94</sup> She regretted that until now, people in search of an authentic artefact from Turkey were only able to find very expensive pieces or even worse some 'bizarre objects'. These objects, such as copper coffee trays, could hardly be considered as Turkish and they were even dishonouring Turkish culture. Bergin believed that the exhibition upset all these souvenir shops by revealing the true Turkish arts. The illustrative pictures in the article consisted only of the products of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office.

In a similar manner, *Cumhuriyet* advertised that the Travel Association of Turkey took the matter of tourist souvenirs into its own hands and prevented tourists from taking home inappropriate representations of Turkish handicrafts as mementos from Turkey.<sup>95</sup> In the article, Selmi Andak, a renowned Turkish composer and art critic, further noted that the artefacts stood as rich sources of inspiration for educated artists in the field of practical arts. Thus, the exhibition was a call for these artists to reinterpret traditional handicrafts in accordance with contemporary aesthetics and needs. Ahmet Kutsi Tecer, a poet known for his studies of Turkish folk culture, also believed that the exhibition drew attention to the importance of handicrafts just at the right time, when the practice was being extinguished by the threat of cheap mass production.<sup>96</sup> He suggested that recourse to the rich tradition of handicrafts would particularly ameliorate the souvenir industry which, according to him, was in a very poor condition. Tecer split the available souvenirs in Turkey into three groups. The first group consisted of mass-produced products formally inspired by handicrafts. The artists shaped these objects broadly through the appropriation of favourable traditional forms, colours, patterns, and materials. Products in the second group were individual art objects. These could

either be totally modern forms or reinterpretations of various craft products. Tecer counted the works of renowned ceramic artist Füreya Koral and artist Bedri Rahmi in this category. The last group included the examples of cottage industry created by villagers to meet local demands. For Tecer these were the true examples of folkloric crafts created by individual applications of centuries-old tradition. While the exhibition included samples from all categories, the objects belonging to the last group outnumbered the others. Tecer believed that the future of the souvenir industry depended largely on the future developments in the first two fields while folkloric arts were also kept alive as an inspirational resource.

To sum up, the products of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office were launched at a time when there was a lively debate about the aesthetic and representative qualities of handicrafts. It was agreed that the authentic Turkish national identity was embodied in the traditional craft products. Despite there being no consensus regarding the denomination of the field, the common opinion was that *küçük sanat*, handicrafts or artisanship, stood at the heart of Turkish culture. It offered a rich repertoire of products that had been moulded by centuries of tradition, which in turn made them an authentic representation of national identity and taste. The expansion of these products into the international markets, particularly in the form of souvenirs, depended on their creative, formal, and aesthetic interpretations. Products of the office demonstrated how such an appropriation could be achieved while considering contemporary taste and needs.

## Conclusion

Following a few years of intense activity, the program was terminated because of its failure to proceed to the stage of mass production and marketing of the available prototypes.<sup>97</sup> When the Turkish Handicraft Development Office was closed at the beginning of the 1960s both American and Turkish partners expressed discontent about the progress of the project.<sup>98</sup> The US officials complained that the project became export-oriented, neglecting the production of consumer goods for the domestic market.<sup>99</sup> They considered recovery in the domestic market as indispensable for the economic recovery of Turkey, which was the main objective of the project. Failure to mass-produce the samples created in the office caused dissatisfaction on both sides. Turkish officials requested the termination of the contract, as promised outcomes could not be achieved at the end of the first year.<sup>100</sup>

Despite its failure, the Turkish Handicraft Development Office has been an inspiring experience for its Turkish stakeholders. First of all, the technical aid project expanded the discussion about handicrafts beyond its social and economic aspects. The project constituted an instance in which craft was handled more as a cultural practice. Besides, the office presented inspiring ways to incorporate creative thinking into traditional production processes based on the repetition of similar samples. The office's products were interesting examples of ways to create a modern aesthetic style and finding new uses for traditional artefacts through design.

The amalgamation of modern and traditional also offers an insight into the way crafts were positioned against industrial production in Turkey. Progression through industrialization was one of the main agendas of the country and craft production was also framed within this developmentalist perspective. Craft was not situated as an antidote to industrialization but rather as a complementary element of it. For the ruling ideology, the significance of craft production was rooted in the social and economic virtues of the practice. As a self-employed group that could not be identified as either capitalist

or worker, craft practitioners were perceived by the government cadres as 'the backbone of the 'middle class' who would be the guarantors of the 'order and harmony' of the nation'.<sup>101</sup> Actually, the middle class in itself was a key ideological attraction due to its political, social and economic promises. The middle classes were considered a particularly central element to the national development and prosperity owing to their potential of technological improvement and hence increased productivity.<sup>102</sup> Briefly stated, artisans, as the key elements of a growing middle-class, were handled as a social group rather than a professional one. This, in turn, influenced the way governmental bodies shaped policies and measures regarding their condition. American and Turkish counterparts set the scope of craft development program taking into account this socio-economic weight that the practice had. Yet the experience of the Turkish Handicrafts Development Office broadened the perspective and brought about questions regarding the design qualities and the creative attributes of crafted products that were on the table. An inquiry into the progression and reviews of American design aid to Turkey reveals that at least an awareness of design began to emerge within the governmental circles, and as early as 1950s Turkish statesmen and representatives of craft bodies began to pay regard to the idea of design without naming it as such.

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## Notes

- 1 This study was supported by Yaşar University Scientific Research Grant Scheme with project number BAP 062 entitled "Research on the American Design Aid to Turkey and the Turkish Handicraft Development Office.
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