

# **INTERNATIONAL ARENA OF ALL ARCHITECTS AND URBAN PLANNERS CELEBRATES THE 100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF PROFESSOR, ARCHITECT AND URBAN PLANNER KEMAL AHMET ARU**

**NURAN ZEREN GÜLERSOY**

**Istanbul Technical University, (ITU) Faculty of Architecture  
Urban and Regional Planning Department**

Together with the world of architecture and urban planning, the Faculty of Architecture of Istanbul Technical University celebrates with esteem, affection and yearning the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of our Dearest Professor Kemal Ahmet Aru, architect and urban planner.

According to the decision taken unanimously during the 36th General UNESCO Conference held in Paris between the 25 October and 10 November 2011, UNESCO will offer it's support to the celebration of Professor Kemal Ahmet Aru's birth of 100th anniversary and his commemoration on an international level. The decision stressed the fact that Prof. Kemal Ahmet Aru, who launched the scientific field of architecture, urban design, urban and regional planning in Turkey was to be considered as a worldwide reference in the same fields.

In this paper, I wish to commemorate the life of our Dearest Professor with his own words, using excerpts of his last book: ***“Kemal Ahmet Aru-Bir Üniversite Hocasının Yaşamının 80 Yılı”*** (*Kemal Ahmet Aru - 80 Years of the Life of a University Professor*), of which he had offered me an autographed copy some time before his death, as well as illustrations which he handed over to me saying: ***“one day these illustrations and information might be useful to you.”*** (1)

Our Dearest Professor begins his memoirs ***“Kemal Ahmet Aru-Bir Üniversite Hocasının Yaşamının 80 Yılı”*** in the following manner: ...

*“I have always wondered how I was to start the story of this long life of mine... It was quite clear that what I was about to write would be constituted of many chapters... Thus, the best thing to do would probably be to treat these different parts as time slices... As I approximately divided the 80 years, I remembered into decades, I realized that these periods corresponded to important turning points in my life... This behaviour must be due to my habits as general planner... I was born in 1912, and I was just 70 years old when I retired from ITU in 1982, leaving behind me 42 years of working life.”*

He starts to tell his born, his family and childhood:

*“Indeed, I was born on 10 July 1912 in the district of Üsküdar, in the neighbourhood of Mehmet Pasha, on No: 7 of a street called Tıglioğlu Sokağı. I came to the world in an old mansion surrounded by a big garden. My father, Ahmet Halim Bey, had received a military education, completing his studies at the ‘Harbiye’ Military school. My mother, Raika Hanım, was born in the Doğançular Neighbourhood of Üsküdar, and came to the Halis Paşa mansion as a bride.”*

The book includes many reminiscences of the War of Independence and the foundation of the Turkish Republic, which our Professor hardly ever mentioned... We thus understand that our Professor constitutes the “Grand Monument” not only of architecture and urban planning; but also of the history of the Turkish Republic... This is how he remembers those days:

*“There are vague memories of that time in my mind that find no place to leave a trace... Memories left from people close to me who have departed from this world... One day they rounded us all into a small room on the mansion’s lower floor: War planes were bombing the Haydarpaşa Station. We heard distant sounds of artillery pieces... It turned out we were in the First World War. Apparently we had sided with the Germans and British plains had reached Istanbul. These are very vague memories... They must date from 1918... One morning, we woke up to see our garden full of foreign soldiers. The British, the French and the Italians had invaded Istanbul... And the Italians were punishing Ahmet Halim Bey for joining the Nationalist Forces fighting for independence (Kuvayi Milliye) by requisitioning his house and using it as a military barrack, filling our garden*

*with troops... I was never able to forget the order to 'leave the house within an hour.' We gathered and moved to the ground floor of my uncle's neighbouring house... ”*

He continues telling his mother's memories during the years of occupation and War of Independence:

*“We woke up one morning and found that they had taken my mother to the military court. My dear mother was only 28 years old... This is how she spoke of those days, ‘Before the occupation, your father and his friends would get together and talk. At that time houses were divided between the haremlık (women's quarters) and the Selamlık (men's quarters). I could not mingle with these people. They would bring ammunitions to the house. I knew that I was sleeping with bombs under my bed. We would regularly be sending food to the nationalist forces’. The Entente Forces blacklisted my father. As soon as the occupation began they pin pointed my father and said this man is an ‘ittihatçı’ (a member of the Nationalist Committee for Union and Progress). The Italians occupied the house. Nowadays our youth finds everything readily available and thinks all this was obtained easily. What sacrifices... what unity they had... I always wonder; had my mother been of another temperament, how far would I have been able to go at any stage of my life...”*

The years of Galatasaray that took nine years between 1923 and 1932... and this is how our Professor summarizes his years at the Galatasaray High School and the Academy of Fine Arts, which he considers as the most colourful and most active period of his life:

*“My Galatasaray period lasted nine years, from 1923 to 1932... I can say that these years were the most colourful, lively and richest of the 90 years of my life, as well as those most full of memories. My passage before Atatürk with the Galatasaray Boy Scout Troop during the 29 October Official Parade remains one of my most unforgettable experiences. My acceptance as a boy scout was interesting. I was very skinny at that time so that the school doctor twice prevented me from becoming a scout. I was very upset by this. Finally at my third attempt the doctor said, ‘You have taken a few kilos in weight, you can now become a scout.’... I was the happiest man on earth. I had managed to become a boy scout by filling my pockets with stone and metal pieces.” ...*

He explains his interest in architecture and Academy of Fine Arts and leading role of Descriptive Geometry teacher Mr. Memboury:

*“At high school, I was particularly interested in the home works that our Descriptive Geometry teacher Mr. Memboury would give us... He would always give me good marks. In other words, I had an interest in this field already at that early time. Every week, I would be unsatisfied with the design drawings he would distribute to us and would repeatedly come back and work on them before delivering them back; some of my friends would ask me to use the versions I was not happy with... One day Mr. Memboury told me, ‘After high school you should continue at the Academy of Fine Arts, in the Architecture Department, I think you will be very successful.’ Thus my first steps towards this profession began with Mr. Memboury’s advice, after the interest I had shown for descriptive geometry... In the spring of 1932, following an entrance examination, I began my studies at the only institution teaching architecture in Turkey at the time, the Architecture Department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Fındıklı. The memories I have of my five years at the academy are too numerous to describe”...*

He goes on to his graduation from the Academy of Fine Arts, his marriage and his military service:

*“I graduated from the Department of Architecture of the Academy with high honours... At the end of 1937, I was 25, tall, slim and just about handsome enough. I was a youth who spoke French, German and had completed his high school and higher education. One day my mother said, ‘your father says lets marry Kemal. What do you have to say about that?’ I remember answering, ‘we’d better not hurry too much.’ I had met Günseli at the Academy and liked her. Finally we got to know each other and decided to get married. We celebrated our wedding on 14 July 1938 at the Tarabya Hotel. Immediately after, I went to do my military service. I was discharged in December 1939.”*

After completed his military service, in April 1940, Prof. Aru, started to work for Higher Engineering School, Department of Architecture (Yüksek Mühendis Mektebi, Mimarlık Bölümü), as an assistant. This is how Professor Aru recalls the beginnings of his academic career:

*“In April 1940, I was appointed assistant at the Faculty of Architecture, which had been re-established by late Prof. Emin Onat, at the School of Engineering. Prof. Onat had just returned from Switzerland. At that time, Prof. Debb, from France, was giving courses in architecture. Being from (French speaking) Galatasaray, I was appointed as his assistant. In the same year, we moved from the paternal house in Moda to a flat in Nişantaşı, on the European side, in a building called Metanet Apartment, in a street called Güzelbahçe. My son Emre was born in June 1942 and my daughter Lale in November 1948, in the same flat. I had a small working room. In those years I took part in many a competition and got some good results.”*

He continuous to tell his academic and professional life in the years 1940's and 1950's in Nişantaşı Metanet Apartment:

*“Many of my architectural plans and studies were prepared in that small working room. We also celebrated my associate professorship (doçent) in this flat. In the years when I was an assistant there was no clear cut formal distinction between assistantship and associate professorship. After being an assistant you would receive the title of müderris muavini, the Turkish expression then used for assistant professor. In the mean time I won the first prize in an architectural competition and when the director of the School Engineering Tevfik Taylan learned that I had won the competition, he said to Emin Onat, ‘The assistant we have, Kemal, is good, let's make him assistant professor’. I was thus to become assistant professor following the suggestion of Director Tevfik Taylan, however, just at that time, the School of Engineering was linked to the Ministry of Education and restructured, so that I happened to be the first to prepare a thesis and defend it to become an associate professor (doçent). My first associate professorship examination took place in Firki Santur Amphi, which faced the sea, at the Gümüşsuyu building. I sat in front of a jury composed of professors of what was then called the Faculty of Building Construction. My thesis subject was ‘Hamams in Turkish Architecture.’ The professors asked questions during the*

*oral examination. I was very excited but as I entered the examination room, the late director Tevfik Taylan, came up to me. He must have realized how stressed I was and he said, ‘Look here son; I’ll give you an advice. Don’t get stressed, keep in mind that the people sitting before you know probably less about the subject you are treating than you do. So just go ahead and quietly say what you have to say.’ I remembered these words of Tevfik Taylan for the rest of my career.”*

Yes I myself remember Prof. Kemal Ahmet Aru, telling me the same thing as my doctorate mentor. Indeed when I entered the doctoral examination room. He said, ‘**don’t worry nuran; don’t forget that no one among us knows your doctorate subject better than you do’**

Our professor continues to tell us about his academic life, and his associate professorship: ...  
*“In 1943, I was promoted to the position of associate professor at the Second Building Information Chair. I began to give theoretical and practical courses as associate chair to Professor Holzmeister. Prof. Holzmeister was from Vienna and had worked with Ataturk. Between 1928 and 1932, he had prepared the plans for all the Ministerial Buildings and had designed the Presidential Building, following the requests of the Great Leader. I was very happy to be working with him”...*

*“In 1943, we started to work with Prof. Oelsner at the old Engineering School building in Gümüşsuyu. In 1942, Mukbil Gökdoğan had been this professor’s assistant for a year. I worked for about a year for both Prof. Holzmeister and Prof. Oelsner. At the time, Emin Onat had invited Prof. Louis Sue, from France, who gave his courses in French, so that I was appointed to assist him as interpreter as well... In the years 1942-1944, I also assisted Prof. Ziya Kocainan in his building course. These were years of very intensive work, at a time when my basic discipline still remained undefined. ”*

This is how our professor explains how the discipline of urban planning was born within the architecture profession: ...

*“Finally in 1944, I began to work with Prof. Oelsner as associate professor at the Chair of Urbanism, upon the request of Prof. Emin Onat. We then worked together on many occasions, at the Faculty of Architecture until 1949, and later on until his death in 1957. Prof. Oelsner had a strong personality and there was a deep philosophical side to him. I can say that to be able to meet him and work with him was the chance of my life... In 1949, we moved from Gümüşsuyu to Taşkışla Building. ITU Urban Design and Urban Planning courses began to be given in the historical first room of the right hand corridor situated on the building’s ground floor (the one with the large red Moroccan armchairs that served as a rest room during lunchtime).”*

And this is how Prof. Aru summarised how he was oriented towards the profession of urban design and urban planning as he recalls his memories of Prof. Oelsner:

*“Prof. Oelsner taught for some eight years at the ITU Faculty of Architecture and I worked with him during this whole period. Prof. Oelsner had graduated from the Technical University of Berlin. He had worked as architect in Berlin and later in his home town of Hamburg, where he worked for the municipality, later becoming the building Senator of the City Council. He was an urban planner of architectural background. At the time, there was no distinct city planning branch and city planning was considered as part and parcel of architecture... Prof. Oelsner had been in charge of urban planning during his long years as Building Senator in Hamburg. He had remained in Germany for some time during Hitler’s rule, but had left for the USA in 1939, due to suspicions that his family might have Jewish relations and related worries. From there he was invited to come and work in Turkey by Muammer Çavuşoğlu, responsible for Building and Development at the Ministry of Public Works. He was appointed Head Development Advisor at the Ministerial Department of Urban Technical Services. Emin Onat was a good friend of Prof. Oelsner and it was on this basis that he invited him to teach. In 1943, Prof. Oelsner would come to Istanbul every two weeks and spend two days teaching urban design and urban planning at the Faculty of Architecture. I would assist him in giving his lectures and applied work exercises while he was here. When he couldn’t come, I would work with students on practical city planning exercises. This went on until 1949. It won’t be wrong to say that I benefitted from eight years of training in city planning during this period...”*

*Prof. Oelsner would follow on the ground all the urban design and urban planning projects that were presented to him for his ratification. He would prepare his studies and spend each lesson describing on the blackboard the small towns and cities and urban development plans he was then busy with and explaining down to the finest detail the recommendations he had made, considering their implementability and taking into account the conditions of the country. For some seven of eight years, I was able to learn about the conditions prevailing in Turkey thanks to the information provided by Prof. Oelsner. This is how I came to specialize in Urban Design and Urban Planning. Prof. Oelsner also wanted me to do practice applied research. He had asked me to do the detailed part of the 1/2000 scale plan he had prepared for the city of Kayseri. In 1945, I went to Kayseri quite a few times and finally completed the plan in 1946, following consultation with the local authorities. This was the first development plan I took part in... In the mean time, İller Bankası (Provincial Bank) had been founded and had begun to auction small towns and town plans to architects who had received official permits from the Ministry of Public Works. Believing that knowing the cities of Anatolia, learning about their problems and preparing solutions proposals would play an important role in the training of an urban planner, Prof. Oelsner had encouraged me to prepare development plans... After 1945, I had to go to Ankara two- three times a year, to have the city plans I had prepared approved by the government. The Provincial Bank, the General Directorate of Urban Planning and the Chair for Building and Development Works had been created in Ankara in order to solve problems related to development plans. There was a department in the Ministry called Urban Technical Board (Şehircilik Fen Heyeti). In the years 1943-1948 Prof. Oelsner worked as an expert for this unit, preparing, studying and, if necessary following projects on the ground, visiting the different districts and neighbourhoods... This was how I evolved from Architecture to Urban Design and Urban Planning.*

This is how our professor explains that he became professor and was appointed to the position of head of the Chair of Urbanism at Istanbul Technical University in his memoirs:

...

*“I wrote my book, ‘İkinci Dünya Harbinden sonra Avrupa’da Mesken Problemi’ (Post World War II Housing Problem in Europe) in the 1950s. In 1951, having passed examinations in German and French, and taking into account the two books I had written until then, as well as my works on architecture and city planning, I was appointed to one of the vacant city planning professorships as well as to the Chair of Urbanism ”*

This is how Dear Professor Aru describes the important events that took place in the Faculty and how the discipline of urban design and urban planning developed in the 1950s: ...

*“I can say that in the years between 1950 and 1960, the Architecture professors in the Faculty followed us with some amazement, wondering where on earth this branch of Urbanism and Urban Planning had come from... At the time, urban design and urban planning courses were given only to Architecture students. The curriculum was implemented only after it had been approved by a Board of Professors from the Faculty of Architecture”*

Prof. Aru explains in his memoirs, how important the International Izmir Development Plan Competition in his professional life:

*“In 1952 I took part in the International Izmir Development Plan Competition, together with Gündüz Özdeş, who was then an assistant, and Emin Canpolat, and we came out first. In 1954, The ITU Senate gave us a ‘Special University Award’. The fact that we had won an international contest greatly increased our chair’s prestige. During the same period Prof. Henri Prost left the Istanbul Municipality. The latter then proceeded to create the ‘Board of Development Consultants.’ This committee included Emin Onat, Mukbil Gökdoğan and me, all of us teaching at our Department. Once a week we would gather at the Istanbul Municipality to fulfil our task as development consultants. ”*

We understand from his remarks related to his memories of duties as Faculty Dean that he is not that enthusiastic about administrative duties:

*“In 1954 I was elected as Faculty Dean. This was a purely administrative job. Moreover you had to take part in Faculty Board, Administrative Board, Senate Building Commission and many other administrative and academic meetings... This task lasted for two years*

*and looking back I can say that I lost a lot of time during these two years. Unfortunately until 1982 I was elected twice again to this position (and I'm not including the periods when I acted as proxy)."*

In his book, our Professor sums up the important events of the 1960s in his life, his experiences abroad and his years in Stuttgart as follows: ...

*"During the 1960s, I was very much affected by the '147' events (forcible transfer from the university)... I withdrew to my house and spent long time thinking. Just at that time I received a letter of invitation from the Stuttgart Technical University. They were inviting me as visiting Professor to the Urban Planning Department of the Faculty of Architecture. My visiting professorship at Prof. Horst Linde's Urban Planning Department lasted for almost two years, and it dramatically widened my horizons... Following a law issued in 1962, a document from the ITU Deanship in Istanbul arrived in Stuttgart, specifying that according to this law I would be re-assigned to my chair in October. I returned to my chair at ITU in the middle of October. On 28 October, I was re-elected Faculty Dean."*

In his memoirs, Prof. Aru explains how the discipline of urban planning evolved away from architecture and how the Institute of Urbanism was founded: ...

*"In the 1960s, the discipline of urban planning gradually moved away from the field of architecture within the Faculty. In 1967, the Institute of Urbanism was founded. Some of our assistants advanced in their career during those years, completing their theses and doctorates to become associate professors. Before the Institute of Urbanism was founded, we had organized in the years 1962-66 a series of urban planning conferences within the Chair of Urbanism. This lasted for four-five years. These conferences included all disciplines related to urban design and urban planning, and were given by professors invited from different universities as well as people who held responsible positions in State Institutions that were related to our field. These conferences were followed with great interest. In 1967, after the Institute of Urbanism had been founded, we began to increasingly develop urban planning knowledge at ITU... Different Universities and Institutions related to urban planning in Ankara became members of the Institute. Each year, at the yearly General Board Meetings, themes related to urban planning in Turkey*

*were treated, and I remember once when the number of participants reached 200. There was another important task that this Institute would carry out. It gave the opportunity for many official institutions and local governments to get together and discuss many a problem related to universities. Thus the Chair of Urbanism and Institute of Urbanism had become an important ITU organ opened to the outside world ... In 1965, on my return from the USA; I brought back many documents and plans related to the field of urban design and urban planning. We constituted a working group within the Institute and began to study different training models.”*

This work undertaken by the Chair of Urbanism members under the leadership of Professor Kemal Ahmet Aru would lay the foundations of the graduate urban planning training program. In 1969, ITU launched a two-step education program and in 1974 the Post Graduate Program on urban planning was launched within the postgraduate engineering-architecture program. I happened to be one of the the first students to take part in this program.

Professor Aru, describes the late 1970's as the dark years of in his life, because of the impact of the loss of his dearest wife Günseli Aru:

*“Life between 1970 and 1977 was still all pink and bright... but my dear wife Günseli's days were counted... In the middle of 1977 she succumbed to a severe illness. After that that pink life became black... The following years were to be dark and bleak... Never were they to turn back to pink... ”*

In the 1980s:....

*“In the years 1980-82 university went on as usual... I needed to find myself some important works in order to escape my loneliness... Both my daughter and my son had settled in the USA. I thought of settling there and doing research on urban design courses in American Universities, where this type of training had begun to be provided. There were some 2500 Universities in the USA. I found a catalogue of all the American Universities in a bookshop. I selected 153 of them which were related to our field. We prepared a letter in English explaining the research we had in mind, using the official seal of the ITU Institute of Urbanism. This was to be a survey. We posted 153 letters. Within a month we had*

*received 90 answers. I classified these documents during a second trip and prepared a chart. This work kept me busy and happy.”...*

Finally the retirement period: ...

*...”So finally I retired from ITU in 1982... in every way my conscience was clear; I believed I had played a role in the foundation of this department of ITU (the Urban and Regional Planning Department)... My Faculty and University had found me worthy of the TÜBİTAK Scientific Service Award and had proposed me for to this National Research Institution... I thus retired with a serene mind. However, there was a part of me that was used to work and couldn't stand still. So I continued to work in the following years as well... ”*

42 years of active service in the university between 1940 and 1982... retirement... and later... 2 more decades of highly active life... projects... researches... books... publications... professional practice... travels... historical and other documentation... dispositive... dispositive...dispositive... a unique archive... a real historical monument...

Our dear professor Kemal Ahmet Aru ends the book of the story of his life mentioning love of life...

*“As everybody I love life. However love of life is not enough to actually live... You have to know how to live your life. In order to know how to live, you must analyse life, displaying and observe the parts that constitute it... Now we have begun to look towards the fathomless depths whose bottom is unseen... ”* says our professor.

... Indeed you knew well how to live your life, Dear Professor; you lived a happy and full life and have left behind you a life style which is to be followed by us, besides all the things that remain to be learned from this life...

This year, 2012, on your 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your birth, you are remembered with esteem, affection and yearning, not only by your family, relatives and friends, not only by us your students on whom you have had a deep influence, not only in academic and scientific circles,

not only in our university, not only in Turkey, but in the whole world of architecture and urban planning.

Dear Professor, our endless thanks for all the things you have given us... I am honoured and proud to have been your student every stage of not only my academic life and also my personel life.

(1) Kemal Ahmet Arû (2001), Kemal Ahmet Arû Bir Üniversite Hocasının Yaşamının 80 Yılı, Yapı-Endüstri Merkezi Yayınları, İstanbul.