Exploring the Motives behind the Formations of Recently Established Industrial Design Programs in Turkey

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Abstract: Studies on the history of industrial design education in Turkey suggest that the emergence of industrial design education was mainly a result of government policies and academy, rather than a demand by industries in Turkey. Along with foreign scholars, Turkish academics who were educated abroad played essential roles in department foundations. Until the late 1990s, the number of industrial design bachelor programs in Turkey was not more than five. However, as of 2018, there are almost 30 bachelor programs in Turkey. This study aims to explore the motives behind the rapid increase in the number of industrial design departments in Turkey. The paper explores the initial grounds for the emergence of industrial design departments through the literature review. In order to explore the motivations behind the recently established industrial design departments, interviews were conducted with five heads of departments. Four of them are the founders of their departments. The main motivations, missions, and strategies of these departments were questioned, along with the logic behind the curricula of the departments. The results indicate that regional environment, and the actions taken within available facilities and sources mainly define the missions of recently established industrial design departments.

Keywords: industrial design education; newly-industrializing countries; industrial design departments

1 Introduction

Industrial design education in Turkey has started in the early 1970s. Four state universities provided design education at the bachelor level for the first 25 years. Since the establishment of the first industrial design program in a private university in 1996, there has been a rapid increase in the number of departments in Turkey. Foreign schools influenced the foundation of the initial industrial design departments. Schools in Germany and the USA were among the ones that have affected the programs and curricula (Şatır, 2006; Bayazıt, 2009). Similar to other developing countries, academic institutions, rather than the industry, introduced industrial design discipline into Turkey (Tezel, 2011).
The discussions about the role of design education and design in general, began to address a more integrative function of design in business (Owen, 1990; Boyarski, 1998; Buchanan, 2004). Buchanan (1998) states that design has evolved from being a follower of the industry to be an equal partner of it. Nowadays, design is considered more like a managerial means in business; although the idea goes way back in time (Archer, 2013), the inclusion of design in business education is rather recent (Dunne & Martin, 2006; Nielsen & Stovang, 2015). On the other hand, academicians brought a managerial perspective to design disciplines, together with the recent trends that mainly evolve along with the design thinking approach (Boyarski, 1998; Liebenberg & Mathews, 2012). The more contemporary views also can be observed in the curricula of the design schools (Özcan, 2011). As there has been a rapid increase in the number of undergraduate programs in Turkey for the last 20 years, it can be questioned if these recently established departments and their strategies appear as a result of recent developments, or whether the motives are the result of regional necessities.

To explore the missions and visions of the recently established industrial design departments, interviews are conducted with five heads of departments about the factors and targets that determine the strategies and curricula of these design departments. Since this study focuses on the intended strategies of these new departments, the views of the founders are the main elements of research. The motives and actions of the departments were evaluated along with the department heads’ idealization of the design departments in general.

2 Initiation of Industrial Design Education in Turkey

Although academic studies on design have started earlier within the architecture education, industrial design education in Turkey began in the early 1970s (Bayazıt, 2009). Unlike the pattern described by Buchanan (1998), industrial design education in Turkey did not start as a server of the industry, mainly due to the lack of competition in the local market and the protection of domestic production (Er, 1997). Like the other peripheral countries, the initiation of industrial design in Turkey was evaluated through the Modernist Development Paradigm (Bonsiepe & Cullars, 1991), and the educational model was derived from the examples located in countries such as the USA and Germany (Flores, 2000; Er, Korkut & Er, 2003; Er & Er, 2006).

Until the late 1990s, there were four state universities that provided industrial design education: The State Academy of Fine Arts (Devlet Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi, DGSA, today called Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, İstanbul), Middle East Technical University (METU, Ankara), the State Higher School of Applied Arts (Tatbiki Güzel Sanatlar Yüksekokulu, TGSYO, today part of Marmara University, İstanbul), and Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ, İstanbul). DGSA established an industrial design department in 1971; its founding scholars mainly had interior architecture and architecture backgrounds (Küçükerman, 2006). The industrial design undergraduate education of DGSA has started in 1972 (Şatır, 2006). This department set a pioneering example for others; it mainly improved through co-operation with industry and design competitions (Küçükerman, 2006). Although the educational roots of DGSA are based on French schools (Bayazıt, 2009), mainly examples in Germany influenced the industrial design division (Şatır, 2006).

TGSYO was initiated in 1957 with five departments including textile, graphic arts, ceramics, interior architecture and decorative arts (Celbiş, 2006; Şatır, 2006). The motives behind the launch of this school were educators and bureaucrats of the Ministry of National Education, who had been examining missions of similar schools abroad, especially the ones in Germany (Celbiş, 2006). Some of the graduates were sent to universities abroad to carry on with their education, in order to be employed in the intended industrial design department; one of the reasons behind this choice was the role of Ulm School of Design in the design world (Alyanak, 1998; Celbiş, 2006). At the initial phase, German Werkskunstschules profoundly influenced the department’s education (Şatır, 2006). Although there were educational activities that could be considered in line with industrial design discipline within the interior architecture department, an independent industrial design department opened in 1985 (Alyanak, 1998). The first academicians of the industrial design department were mainly interior architects who continued their education after graduation at various schools located in Germany, Britain, Italy, Japan and Canada (Celbiş, 2006).

Unlike TGSYO and DGSA, the initiation of the industrial design department at METU was affected by the curricula in the US, rather than Europe (Bayazıt, 2006). METU and its industrial design department were included in ICA program; a team of American industrial designers visited the university to evaluate the opportunities for industrial design education; however, their efforts were unsuccessful at the time (Er et al., 2003). An American designer, David K. Munro, led the first studies to form an industrial design education curriculum; he worked with government organizations, multinational organizations and local industries to form a program suitable for Turkey (Asatekin, 2006). Munro formed two elective courses on industrial design within the Department of Architecture in 1969 (Er et al., 2003). Later, documents gained from ICSID’s “Education of Industrial Designers” seminars helped the curriculum
development for the department; three major course groups were formed as knowledge courses, communication courses and design courses (Asatekin, 2006). The undergraduate education has started in 1979 (Er et al., 2003). There were four academicians in the department at the initiation stage (Erbug, 1998).

The formation of industrial design education at ITU was led by lecturers with a background in architecture (Bayazit, 2006). At the beginning of the 1980s, global developments and integration with Europe were listed among the motives behind the initiation of the department (Gunal Ertas, 2011). Programs of foreign design departments led the researches for a curriculum, and drafts of YOK (Council of Higher Education); also, an interdisciplinary approach was adopted in order to benefit from university’s opportunities (Gunal Ertas, 2011). The primary curriculum included many engineering oriented technical courses, which is mentioned as a distinctive element of ITU’s curriculum (Bayazit, 1998; Bayazit, 2006; Gunal Ertas; 2011).

To sum up, it can be said that the emergence of industrial design education in Turkey is mainly due to academic initiatives by scholars and institutions, as suggested in the literature (Tezel, 2011). It is also stated that there was not a significant demand in the industry at the initiation stage and design was promoted through collaboration with industry, competitions and conferences (Kucukkerman, 2006).

3 Recent Developments in Design Education in Turkey

Industial design schools were intended to meet the foreseen demands, which were expected to arise from the import substitution strategies followed in the 60s and 70s (Er & Er, 2006). It is stated that, following the enforcement of the global regulations, an increase of the need for industrial design practices may appear in newly industrializing economies (Kumar, 2003). This increase is related mainly to intellectual property rights, which call for differentiation of product designs (Glass & Saggi, 2002). In line with the assumptions on newly industrializing economies, the number of departments has significantly increased after 1994 (Figure 1). Considering the regulations on intellectual property rights, increases in both demands for design practice and the number of departments are understandable; but there is a lack of evidence in the literature about the actual motives behind this increase.

The number of industrial design departments in Turkey showed significant growths after 1995 and 2004 (Dogu, Timur Ogut & Er, 2015). As stated before, from 1971 till 1994, there were only four state universities in Turkey with industrial design departments (Dogu et al., 2015). The number of universities with design departments became 25 at the end of 2014, which addressed a significant growth since 1995 (Dogu et al., 2015). As of 2018, there are 29 universities with 4-year undergraduate programs in industrial product design and three universities with departments of industrial design engineering (OSYM, 2018). The rapid increase in the number of departments may be due to increasing awareness in the industry, possibly triggered by enforcement of intellectual property rights.

When the curricula of departments are evaluated through the demands of the industry, it may be thought that the curricula are not shaped according to expectations of the industries from designers. A relatively early study by Korkut and Hasdogan (1998) suggests that Turkish industries expect designers to be equipped with better technical, managerial and communicational skills. This study also notes that the managers demanded computer-aided design skills, and there had been significant improvements in the curricula recently. A more current study by Erkarslan, Kaya and Dilek (2013) suggests an incompatibility between curricula and industries’ expectations, as industries tend to employ designers that are equipped with more design skills and contextual understanding. Erkarslan (2013) states that departments do not update their curricula according to industries’ pace and the level of co-operation between departments and industry is still quite low. This referred lack in co-operation is also linked with the low productivity level of these studies (Erkaslan, 2013). Tunali and Toprak (2017) state that, regarding the university and industry cooperation and innovative production, Turkey fails to produce projects that can be actualized to create value in the market. A study by Hasdogan and Sener (2014) states that, Turkish organizations cannot industrialize the projects that are conducted in the studio courses. Buyukati and Sarsilmaz (2011) did a prior study through interviews with academicians, which also suggests that many of the collaborations done within industrial design departments do not result with products that are manufactured. Therefore, the motives of the Turkish firms are rather conceptual, such as gaining new perspectives, on contrary to the industrial outcomes that are mentioned in the literature (Hasdogan and Sener, 2014).
When the developments in the Turkish industrial design education are considered, it can be said that although there is an increase in the need for both design and number of industrial design departments in Turkey, the literature states a gap between academy’s supply and industry’s demand (İlhan & Er, 2016). Also, earlier studies suggest an incompatibility between industries’ and departments’ expectations from designers, and there is a lack of more current studies about the grounds of the increasing number of design departments. Therefore, it may be essential to investigate the missions and motives of recently established design departments in Turkey.

4 The Research

This research aims to find answer to the following main research question:

• What are the missions and motives of newly established industrial design departments in Turkey?

To answer this question, the following sub-questions are formed:

• How do the founders of newly established industrial design departments define an ideal design education?
• What are the strategic goals of recently established departments?
• How do the recently launched departments define their curricula?

To answer these questions, five heads of departments were interviewed. Four of them were the founders of departments. One interview was conducted through e-mail, while others were recorded and transcribed. The selected departments have undergraduate education backgrounds with no more than six years. Three of these departments are at state universities, while the other two are at private universities. Private universities are located in metropolises, while others are in relatively smaller cities. The methodology of this paper falls into the phenomenological research category, as the department founders are actively involved in the formation of the answers of our questions (Groenewald, 2004); purposeful sampling was done for interviewees accordingly (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to receive answers for the following open-ended questions (Merriam, 2009):

• What do you think are the critical factors in determining the mission of a design department?
Exploring the Motives behind the Formations of Recently Established Industrial Design Programs in Turkey

- Are there design schools (abroad) that you consider successful in terms of strategy? Why do you find them successful?
- Are there any industrial design/industrial product design departments that acted as an example in Turkey or abroad during the establishment of the department?
- How was the decision made to set up an industrial design/industrial product design department at your university?
- Does the established industrial design department have a specific purpose?
- How was the departmental curriculum and staffing structured during the department establishment?
- Were the infrastructure needs fulfilled during the establishment of the department? How were these needs determined?
- What are the changes planned in the curriculum in the long or short term? Why are these changes necessary?

The questions listed above are asked to understand interviewees' perceptions of an ideal design education, along with their current and possible future education practices. These questions may reveal the industrial and academic forces behind the formation of an industrial design department in Turkey. The open-ended questions are subjected to thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes are evaluated under three sections as visions of founders, motives behind visions of the departments, and motives for actions. The summary of the themes and frequencies are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The summary of themes and frequencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>SUB - THEMES</th>
<th>U1</th>
<th>U2</th>
<th>U3</th>
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<td>MOTIVES BEHIND THE VISIONS</td>
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<td>Part-time instructors</td>
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<td>Region</td>
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<td>Frequent curricula updates</td>
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<td>Other departments</td>
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4.1 Visions of Founders

Interviewees mentioned several themes when they were asked about the critical factors for determining the mission of an industrial design department. These themes can be roughly evaluated in three groups; industry, academy, university. In this section, the quotes of the interviewees are given under these three main groups, to be discussed further.
Interviewees frequently mentioned relations with industry. Their perspective varied from integration with industry to mentoring the industry. Interviewees mentioned the importance of the state’s economic and industrial policies, as they are claimed to have an organic connection with educational policies, referring to the “integration with the industry” (U1). It was also stated that the department’s role is crucial in directing industries’ transition to the future, therefore acting as a mentor for industries (U1). Another quote that addresses co-operations with industry can be seen below.

"What I consider more successful are the works that are done with the sector and university-industry collaborations." (U3- co-operation with industries)

Also, three interviewees mentioned missions related to the academy itself. It was stated that it could be necessary to give direction to the mission through the values that are referred to as universal (U2). Being multidisciplinary was mentioned by one interviewee.

"Looking at the current situation, design education is mainly carried out within the framework of its disciplinary resources. From this perspective, for example, having a multi-disciplinary and co-operative educational environment can become one of the department’s missions." (U2- being multidisciplinary)

Initial conditions of the departments are among the university-related factors, such as the facilities and restrictions that evolve from the university or the academicians. Institutional factors of a university, such as being built in an urban area, were also considered as factors that define the identity of the university (U2).

“Therefore, there should be a strategy in line with the opportunities provided by the university and related to the expertise of the instructors.” (U4, expertise of the instructors; university’s structure)

It can be inferred that academicians mentioned the collaboration with industry within their ideal department mission. The focus on industrial relations may hint an inclination towards the more recent understanding of co-operation with industries. However, even when interviewees were asked about a hypothetical department’s mission, they mentioned the conditions of the university. Academic concerns are also mentioned when defining the ideal structure for an industrial design education program.

4.2 Motives behind the Visions of the Departments

Sub-themes related to nation, region, academy and university are mentioned in answers that covered the questions about the initiations of the departments. Interviewees mentioned local factors addressing region and nation. These concerns were mentioned by providing examples such as Erasmus agreements, where national understandings about design education were revisited (U2). Regional development and local leadership were also mentioned.

"...our city) is a place that is unjustified on many issues. Generally, investments have been made to the Eastern (region). In this context, bringing an action to (our city) and (our region) is one of the aims of our department. Science and technology are our other focuses on regional development.” (U1- regional development)

“We have set our goal to become the best of the new departments established in Anatolia, in addition to the universities that have hosted industrial design for 35-40 years.” (U3- local leadership)

Corporate factors related to the university are among the other motives in this section. Benefiting from facilities that are provided by other departments was mentioned as a factor that is related to the university’s structure (U4). The interviewees also reviewed the curricula of other departments (U1). Industrial design is perceived as a profession that will be significant in the future; therefore, the existence of industrial design departments is supported by strategy makers regarding the prospective aims of the university (U3). Two interviewees also declared the popularity of the profession.

“Design is also obviously considered as a popular department.” (U2- popularity of the profession)

Academic concerns were mentioned again by two interviewees.

“The curriculum of the department is based on the sound foundations of a theoretical infrastructure supported with an application-oriented structure. Regarding the scope of the main courses, a wide range of projects is carried
out. All the theoretical and practical knowledge that is needed to carry out the project courses are provided through other courses.” (U5- academic concerns)

Although the industry theme appears within the ideal strategic factors, it is not mentioned as a factor that is considered in the initiation of the departments. Local factors such as regional development aim and national development strategies appear in this section, along with the academy factor that addresses core academic concerns, which are also mentioned as factors in the previous section. It can be said that environmental factors such as local sources and the university’s corporate structure are more effective on the determination of the department strategy.

4.3 Motives for Actions

Within motives for actions, sub-themes related to experiences, external environment, region and university can be detected. Interviewees frequently mentioned experiences gained from existent structures, founders, scholars coming from other disciplines and other examples. Founding academicians were claimed to play a role in initial curricula formations, their backgrounds affecting the overall structures of curricula that sometimes derived from another university’s practices (U3). Therefore, even academicians coming from other departments’ backgrounds, such as architecture, may influence a curriculum (U2). Sometimes a founding scholar may play a dominant role, leading to a subjective process in curricula formation (U3). Previous experiences are also effective motives for the departments’ actions.

“...and (formed) through experiences we gained from industrial design workshops.” (U1- previous experiences)

Among the effects of external factors, an increasing number of students is mentioned, as student quotas are mostly defined by YÖK (U5). The availability and expertise of part-time instructors are also mentioned by interviewees (U4). Lack of academicians with post-graduate educations was also referred to as a factor.

“We need a lot of staff who are trained in this field and have completed their doctorate.” (U3- lack of academicians)

The region theme is mentioned again in this section.

“We have changed according to (our city’s) facilities and internal dynamics.” (U3- regional development)

Other sub-themes are mainly about determinants that arise from the university. Some departments seek flexibility in their curricula through elective courses, which help them to maintain the core structure (U4). However, frequent curricula updates are required in some of the others; a reason for this tendency was defined as the structure of the university (U2). The structure of the university is also solely mentioned as a factor; some universities encourage departments to define generic courses and support them with differing contents every semester (U4). Other departments also seem to be among motives for actions.

“There are common core courses that we can call more like an American model.” (U2- other departments)

It can be understood that the formation of curricula is mostly affected by internal and external factors such as facilities in the university, available sources, and regulations. Interviewees frequently mentioned previous experiences on design department curricula and initiating academicians seem to have played important roles. The reappearing themes from previous sections are university and regional development.

5 Discussions

When the distributions of the themes are evaluated, it can be said that most of the themes that are related to the visions idealized by the interviewees are not transferred to departments’ actions in the short term. The only theme that has been mentioned in the three sections is university. The interviewees declared that an industrial design department should be integrated with the industry and provide mentorship. This view seems to be in line with Buchanan’s (1998) projection. Also, factors related to universities and founders are also mentioned, which reflect a relationship with the initiation of industrial design in Turkey. Even though interviewees mention more idealistic missions, they consider factors that are related to the university.

Regarding missions of the newly established departments, the interviewees stressed the effects of the environment; such as the region, university and national factors. While the external factors related to the country and region were
not mentioned in the previous questions, they frequently appeared in motives of the initiation of the departments. Even though universities that are in small cities, most mention regional development. Other universities also have similar concerns about their location, which were expressed through the identity of the university. Factors related to universities were also frequently mentioned; however, co-operation with industries was not stressed here.

Finally, actions taken by the departments are affected mostly by the factors available, such as facilities of the university, student quotas defined by YÖK, availability of the instructors, and academicians that take role in the constitution of the department. Again, co-operation with industries is not mentioned in this section. Focus on regional development was mentioned; however, it was not emphasized as strongly as the answers that were related to the strategies of the departments.

To sum up, it can be said that while interviewees described a more idealistic mission definition for industrial design departments in general, the missions of recently established departments are mainly defined by their environment and actions are taken within available facilities and sources. Interviewees are aware of the necessity of industry-university collaborations; however, while defining the primary missions of the departments, they focus more on local factors such as regional development. The identity of the university was always emphasized as a concern for the interviewees, but it was stressed more in missions of the departments and curriculum foundation.

6 Conclusion

In Turkey, industrial design education has started with initiatives of academicians and influences from the universities abroad. There was a lack of demand from the industry, and the academy took action to promote the profession within the industry. Today, the profession is somewhat known, and department founders mention a possible collaboration with the industry where departments should act as mentors that lead the industry to more ideal design practices. Within this prospected co-operation, local factors are stressed more than before, as industrial design departments in Turkey now appear in locations where the industry is somewhat underdeveloped.

When the initiation of the education practice is concerned, in the beginning industrial design lacked a demand from the industry and educated academicians in the field. Schools in the USA and Germany were examined to build a curriculum suitable for Turkey, and academic concerns were the main priority. The first scholars had backgrounds from other departments and were sent abroad for industrial design education. The first industrial departments in Turkey now appear in locations where the industry is somewhat underdeveloped.

Today’s newly established industrial design departments resemble pioneers in terms of curricula foundation, the effect of initiating instructors and the lack of academicians educated in the field of industrial design. They also seem to aim for an increase in industries’ demand for the profession; however, this time the scope is more regional than national. The universities in smaller cities focus on local industries, while the departments in metropolises emphasize the location of the university as a strategic factor. Interviewees also stress that the university is a significant factor for strategy formation.

It can be said that industrial design education in Turkey still shows characteristics that are attributed to newly industrializing countries. The primary difference seems to be the transition from a national focus to the regional focus. The increase in the number of academicians with industrial design education at post-graduate level and the establishment of sustainable local industries can lead to a more developed education model for these newly founded departments.
References


**About the Authors**

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