

# MAN'S STRUGGLE FOR SHELTER IN AN URBANIZING WORLD

## CHARLES ABRAMS

New York Times, BARBARA HADD: "... Charles Abrams's authoritative study, *Man's Struggle for Shelter in an Urbanizing World*... is the first comprehensive attempt to bring together information on the urban problem at present level

of urbanism and the almost complete failure of governments and agencies to come to grips with it..."

TODAY: "Ever since Charles Abrams helped write this country's first public housing law in 1937 he has been both a sayer and a benefactor to those who provide man shelter in his life after a hard day's work."



and even restricted, in official documents and surveys... Probably no expert in the field of housing knows the developing world as does Mr. Abrams.

"No one is more aware of the gap between what is being studied and done today and what needs to be known and accomplished before tomorrow." *The Economist*, London. "In his pioneering book Mr. Abrams underlines again and again the danger

of virtually excluded housing from their programmes. American assistance bypassed the whole issue until the impact of Castro on the restless urban squatters in South America produced a sudden spurt of housing loans under the Alliance for Progress. In fact, if there is one theme more than any other in Mr. Abrams's wide, discursive, intensely well-informed

*Case of Ferriss and A. E. W. flows, England. "The sheer size of the problem discussed has more American modest and realistic where he might have reacted with flamboyant and nihilist gestures... A brief review cannot do justice to this book. It should be read by anyone whose thinking extends as far as the kind of world his studies are going to live in." *Middle East Journal*. "... a very important work — it is the first to deal with world problems of urbanization and housing... It is*

... *MAN'S STRUGGLE FOR SHELTER* [is based on the author's work as a United Nations consultant and adviser to more than a dozen nations... It is significant reading for all Americans who deal with our own metropolitan difficulties... It will appeal widely because its clear style and concision provide information and attract the conscience as well." *Progressive Architecture*. BURNHAM KELLY, "This is a most unusual book. It

**Story of  
Establishment of  
METU**

**Excerpts from**

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by Charles Abrams

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and sociology, and the host of other professions and talents a developing country needs. She had relied to some extent on foreign aid to fill these gaps, but the visiting experts usually stayed a month or a year and left. Their reports were filed away, often because there were no people to implement or even interpret them.<sup>3</sup> It was apparent that what Turkey needed was not only foreign experts but trained people who remain in the country and who can only be trained through an internal educational program.

### CONCEIVING A UNIVERSITY

When I went to Turkey on a U.N. mission, I had not the slightest notion that a university would be the outcome.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the odds were against the success of any mission, for an expert carrying no funds in his portfolio was just another expert. In 1954, he would rarely get to see anyone with the rank of a cabinet minister and was more often assigned to a minor functionary who would spend an occasional hour with him lamenting the predicaments of officialdom. A U.N. economics mission with three prominent experts, after struggling to make an impact on the government, had packed its belongings and left in despair.

There was, nevertheless, one important factor favoring the prospects for a university in Turkey, i.e., the sheer need for it. A university could do more than train people, more than simply develop an indigenous competence in architecture.<sup>5</sup> The need for architects and planners was

<sup>3</sup> This was the fate of a report on housing made by the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, which, though printed and bound, lay inviolate under a stack of forgotten papers in a petty official's file.

<sup>4</sup> In my first letter to Ernest Weissmann urging the United Nations to take up my recommendation for the establishment of the university, I wrote:

. . . After 5 weeks in Turkey, it became apparent to me that any technical recommendations I might make would make no more dent than a mosquito's bill on the hull of a battleship. The Turks, however willing, simply have not the administrative or the technical equipment with which to implement any technical recommendations I might make. Any laws I might prepare would not be enforced and a detailed report with elaborate recommendations would be relegated to the dust-bin.

Ankara itself, which hums with civil servants engaged in the nation's development, has no technical university in either engineering or architecture so that the city in which policy is made for the whole country and which is the seat of almost all technical work and equipment is an intellectual desert as far as architectural and planning talent is concerned. The country with a people who solved the problem of the true pendentive centuries ago and contributed originality in art and structure to a dark world is now, architecturally speaking, in the darkest ages itself and shows little hope of emerging unless the base of a revolution in design and structure is indigenously developed under a long-range scheme.

<sup>5</sup> It was not the first time that absence of good architects and of a good architectural school impeded Turkey's progress. Edward Gibbon records that in the building of Turkey's capital, "Constantine soon discovered that, in the decline of the

the wedge, but engineering and training in other disciplines were also essential to build the country. A university could be the focus of much-needed research. If located in Ankara, it would be oriented toward Asiatic Turkey, as well as Istanbul. It could draw upon the pool of experienced personnel in the nation's capital to help with training. An interchange of ideas between teachers and government officials would benefit both, and the country as a whole. If opened to students throughout the Middle East, the institution could help expand training in other countries as well.

Official experts from the United States had considerable influence in Turkey thanks to the millions of dollars behind their advice, but U.N. missions got no cooperation from them either in money or in sympathetic interest. There was in fact a hostility among ICA officials to the idea of a U.N.-sponsored project that either emanated from or was carried over into the State Department in Washington. In any event, a competitive feeling was manifest and persisted for years after the university had begun to function. The fact that the proponent was American, the teaching was to be in English, and an American university was to be later involved as advisor never altered the American attitude.

It was not until I met an American-trained Turkish engineer named Vecdi Diker that I found a sympathetic response to the idea of a new university. He introduced me to Fatin Zorlu, then Acting Prime Minister. After a conference, I prepared a memorandum, dated October 1, 1954, setting forth the following justifications for the institution:

1. There was a shortage of architects and planners (city, village, and regional) qualified to help in properly developing the country.
2. With the country in the process of growth, building was proceeding rapidly, and physical patterns were being created that would have a lasting influence upon the future formation of the country.
3. The proper development of the country could not be assured through the aid of foreign experts alone, although they were needed to advise on the creation of an institution, to help staff it with competent teachers during the early years, and to train Turkish architects and planners both in teaching and in the practice of the professions over the long term.
4. Though there were more trained engineers than architects in the country, there was a shortage of engineers as well—thus after the school

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arts, the skill as well as numbers of his architects bore a very unequal proportion to the greatness of his designs." He directed his magistrates to institute schools and appoint professors and spur "ingenious youths who had received a liberal education" to become architects. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1962), Vol. I, p. 309.

of architecture and community planning was organized and in operation, the scope of the school should be expanded so as to embrace engineering. However, the teaching of architecture should be directed toward a specialized profession, not coupled with engineering as a unit either in training or in the conferring of degrees; the same principle should apply to the engineering profession.

5. The necessity for such an institution in Ankara was emphasized by several facts: Ankara had no such institution, either within its boundaries or within the immediate region; architecture, engineering, and planning policies vitally affecting Turkish development were being made in Ankara; there were many students as well as civil servants who could benefit from study or association with competent experts and teachers from abroad, and who would apply for entry; their training and association with a university and with such experts would improve the quality of design and the physical development of national undertakings as well as the quality of private developments.

At Zorlu's request, I prepared a tentative budget for a university showing, among other things, how much would be required in foreign funds and how much in Turkish lira. I also appended a brief memorandum on the details of fulfillment dealing with the following:

1. Temporary quarters for the institution could be made available by the government during its initial stages at one of the schools in Ankara or in some other suitable place.

2. The project could best be implemented by having an established university abroad assume the primary task of advising on the budgeting of the program, programming the courses, aiding in the staffing of the professional and administrative personnel, and prescribing the requirements for entry and for degrees. I suggested that the School of Architecture and City Planning of the University of Pennsylvania (where I was then teaching) be requested to advise on these phases of the program.

3. The further aid of the United Nations toward implementing the program was to be solicited.

4. A committee, to be designated by the Turkish government, would further the proposal. The committee would study financing requirements, confer with those concerned with the proposal's development, and make the proper recommendations. As soon as possible the committee's composition would be broadened to include foreign experts, particularly from the United States, who could establish desirable liaisons with foundations, the University of Pennsylvania, the United Nations, or other groups whose technical or financial aid might be helpful. Steps would be taken to have the committee designated and have it con-

fer with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Public Works, and others involved with the program.

5. At the appropriate time the government would announce the appointment of the committee, the purpose of its formation, and the preliminary plans to be taken toward initiating the undertaking.

On October 6, 1954, Olle Sturen, the officer then heading the U.N. office in Turkey, sent a memorandum to the Turkish Minister of Education, setting forth the objectives of the university. Simultaneously, Sturen wrote a letter to the United Nations in which he said:

The reason why this project to me seems so important is that as far as I understand, it is the first time since we started our technical assistance programme in Turkey, that our recommendations have been so rapidly accepted and not only that but have been discussed, considered and accepted on the absolutely highest governmental level. I am certain you agree with me that if we achieve success in this project, it will reflect on the future of the whole U.N. technical assistance here in Turkey.

After receiving approval of the plan in principle from both the United Nations and the University of Pennsylvania, I asked the government to release the plan to the press. Though all the details were still to be worked out, I felt that a public announcement while I was still in Turkey would make the commitment firm. The announcement met with an enthusiastic public response.

Early in 1956, Turkey's Ministry of Education officially opened the Middle East Technical University. After preliminary assurances of interest by the United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, the United Nations Special Fund appropriated \$1.5 million for the venture, and Thomas B. A. Godfrey was selected to represent the U.N. and help get the university started. Under a second team, headed by Dean Holmes Perkins of the University of Pennsylvania, a faculty of architecture and community planning was assembled, and classes were started in October 1956 in temporary quarters. During the next two years, M.E.T.U. added three more schools, one in engineering, one in the administrative disciplines, and another in the arts and sciences.

### *THE UNIVERSITY IS CHARTERED*

Though functioning since 1956, the university was formally chartered by the government in 1959 as a government-owned but quasi-autonomous institution similar to state universities in the United States. While the Minister of Education has a voice in financial matters, the university's president and Board of Trustees make the policy. In 1960, Turkey was paying the largest share of the school's annual budget (\$2.4 million); in-

ternational sources contributed approximately \$600,000. The United States up to 1960 was still not among the contributors. In 1960 the first 30 students were graduated out of a total of 515 matriculants.

Since the teaching staff would be drawn from all over the world (Great Britain, Norway, Japan, Italy, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, and the United States), it was obviously necessary to choose a single language for studies. Because of Turkey's close ties with the countries that use English as their language for the teaching of the sciences, and because of the abundance and availability of English literature in technology and other important fields, English was selected.

The original plan was to grant a master's degree after four full years of study, the students spending two semesters a year in study and the summer season in supervised employment in the field. Most of the departments now, however, have redesigned their curricula so that a bachelor's degree is given upon completion of all courses at the end of four years, and a master's degree is conferred upon those found competent after a fifth year of study. The development of a city-planning course was one of the original objectives, but it did not get under way until 1961.

The university has a unique staff pattern, which might well be studied by institutions of higher learning in other developing countries. From the president on down to the academic level of deans, directors, and department chairmen, there would be both a Turkish and a foreign counterpart, until time and experience had given the Turkish administrators a solid basis in Western techniques of higher education. For example, while the charter requires that the permanent president be a citizen of Turkey, his consultant president in the early period was to be a scientist or engineer of international reputation from another country. Two American educators, Dean W. R. Woolrich and later Dr. Edwin S. Burdell, were the first consultant presidents. After Dr. Burdell resigned, Kemal Kurdaş, a dynamic Turkish educator, was officially named to head the university.

In November 1959 the Board of Trustees established an architectural competition for design of the university and University City.<sup>6</sup> In 1963, M.E.T.U. was in the process of completing a university that will ultimately be teaching 12,000 engineers, scientists, and other technicians on an 11,000-acre University City located five miles from Ankara. The Turkish government expects to spend the equivalent of \$12.5 million on the grounds and buildings. In addition to the \$1.5 million contributed initially by the United Nations Special Fund, the Ford Foundation has given \$250,000 for graduate studies and research projects, and after a

<sup>6</sup> See *Time*, Vol. LXXVI, No. 2 (July 11, 1960), p. 81, and the Middle East Technical University release dated February 1960 and signed by W. R. Woolrich, consultant and interim president of M.E.T.U. at that time.

long delay, AID gave \$350,000 in equipment and the services of four Cornell University professors for the university's Faculty of Administrative Sciences.

In November 1963, M.E.T.U. began its sixth year with an enrollment of 2100 young men and women. The student body in 1963 was twice that of 1962. It was described in 1963 as "the fastest growing university in the world."<sup>7</sup> About 10 per cent of the student body came from other Middle Eastern countries, and some from Africa.<sup>8</sup> There were 300 on the teaching staff, 65 of whom were non-Turkish nationals. All around them, contractors and construction men were busy building additional laboratories, dormitories, and facilities.

On November 5, 1963, President Kurdaş wrote me that the university was then

. . . engaged in completing the first phase of this program which will be sufficient to meet the needs of 6000 students. This first part of the construction program, which I am determined to have finished before October 1964, includes fifteen buildings with the utility services of water, electricity, roads, telephone, sewage system, gas and heating. As of the end of October 1963 we have already completed a substantial part of this building program and all the utility services.

On October 1, 1963, the students were enrolled as follows: engineering, 952; architecture, 228; administrative sciences, 441; arts and sciences, 439. The engineering department included chemical, civil, electrical, mechanical, and mining engineering. The architecture department embraced city and regional planning as well as architecture. The administrative sciences covered economics, statistics, management, and public administration. Under the department of arts and sciences were the departments of chemistry, education, humanities, mathematics, physics, theoretical physics, and the social sciences.

Turkey has been a troubled country. When the Menderes government was succeeded by a military group, the university naturally experienced some difficulties, but so far it seems to have survived the transition period. UNESCO has taken over the United Nations' representation and has helped in staffing and other aspects.

Institutions of learning cannot avoid the problems of flux and of rapid and sometimes even violent change in developing nations. The Middle East Technical University is no exception. But already the university has made an important contribution. That it has continued and

<sup>7</sup> *New York Times*, October 21, 1963, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> In the letter to the author dated November 5, 1963, the university's president, Kemal Kurdaş, wrote: "We have had serious difficulties in recruiting foreign students. In general, they do not qualify in the competitive entrance examinations which take place every July. In order to overcome this difficulty we have established a special quota for foreign students."

grown under the new government, though a creature of the old, is a tribute to Turkish officials and an indication that the struggle for improved education has been placed above the battle.<sup>9</sup>

Training is a long and tedious process, but there are no shortcuts. Ventures like M.E.T.U. are indispensable and, it is hoped, will continue to find a prime place among Turkey's interests, in international aid programs, and in the aid programs of the United States.<sup>10</sup>

As the years pass and the thousands of trained young men and women take their places throughout Turkey's cities and farms, M.E.T.U.—though it was unsupported until recently by United States aid programs—will have a greater and more lasting impact on Turkey and perhaps on the Middle East than most other aid programs to which the United States gave its money and support.<sup>11</sup> A university teaches many lessons to many people—and here is at least one lesson for the United States as well.

### THE NEED FOR RESEARCH

Education and research go together. Both are imperatives in the struggle for development. "Billions of dollars of investment have been lost," says Paul G. Hoffman, "because millions were not spent in adequate preparatory activities. Many sound projects have been passed by because of inadequate investigation. Investment opportunities are not usually found. They must be created."<sup>12</sup> In the 1950's wholly inadequate attention was given to "surveys of resources, technical training and industrial research."<sup>13</sup>

The main criticism of research into the problems of underdeveloped areas is not its inadequacy as a tool but the inadequacy of hypotheses to

<sup>9</sup> Vecdi Diker is no longer a trustee, but without his untiring efforts on behalf of the university, it could not have emerged. In the bitterness that followed the downfall of the Menderes government, Fatin Zorlu in 1961 was among those executed. I have no way of knowing the merits of the charges or the justification for the punishment. I know only that this highly cultured man was unselfish in his firm support of the university in its formative years.

<sup>10</sup> Credit for launching a university rates far less than credit for seeing it through. In that perspective, the trustees during its first hard years, the teaching and administrative staff, the American and Turkish presidents, and the United Nations and UNESCO deserve the accolades. Had U.N. officials, particularly Julia Henderson, Ernest Weissmann, Arthur Goldschmidt, and Tagi Nasr, not relied on my representations by letters from Turkey, the university would never have been born.

<sup>11</sup> At long last in 1963, Cornell University, with AID sponsorship, undertook to give its course in public administration.

<sup>12</sup> At the National Conference on International Economic and Social Development, Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C., June 15, 1961.

<sup>13</sup> Paul G. Hoffman, *One Hundred Countries, One and One Quarter Billion People* (Washington, D.C.: Albert D. and Mary Lasker Foundation, 1960), p. 31.