Chapter 1
Introduction: Neo-liberalism and the End of the Profession of Architecture

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Architecture today refers to many incompatible theoretical and practical fields deriving from a very general understanding of studies of human habitats to very solid physical products designed by authorized architects. The confusion originating from the denotation of several concepts in the word architecture can be eliminated if and only if we try to identify clearly these concepts and their denotations and create several terms for each of these concepts and make them as clear as possible (Nuccetelli and Seay 2008, p: 40).

Today, the term of architecture is erroneously used to identify six distinguishable fields related to making human habitats. These are the culture of habitation building crafts, architectural design discipline, the profession of architecture, construction and real estate development business and spatial agency (Sadri 2017). Identifying the differences between these fields and denoting specific terms to each of these fields will prevent complication and help us to distinguish clearly the activities that can be specifically categorized under the profession of architecture.

1.1 Fields of Practice Related to Human Habitation Practices

(1) Culture of Habitation

Similar to all other living beings, individual or collective attempts of human beings in creating habitats for themselves result in the culture of habitation. Based on the

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local conditions of the habitat, this culture of habitation contains the skills, techniques and knowledge of adapting to nature for creating sustainable resources for the inhabitants' survival needs, such as drinkable water, preservable food and adequate shelter. This culture shapes the vernacular habitats, and its knowledge is being updated and transferred to the next generations.

(2) **Building Crafts**

As a result of the human settlement and establishment of civilization, domestication of nature and agriculture, building mastery or traditional building crafts have strengthened as a working area in the cities/castles and for centuries served the political, economic and religious powers until the end of the Feudalist era. Contrary to the culture of habitation and vernacular habitats, the building crafts have focused on the production of stronger, enduring, everlasting, high and large spaces, not compatible with climatic and local conditions, independent from the human scale and needs, and disassociated with the context and place (Kostof 2000; Roth 2007).

(3) **Architectural Design Discipline**

Spatial or architectural design discipline was formed at the intersection of art and technique. It has enabled the development of the architectural discourse, research and education as an intellectual field and played a significant role in the transformation of the building crafts. By providing the necessary education to become an architect, the spatial design discipline paved the way for shaping the profession of architecture (Ettlinger 2000; Wilkinson 2000).

(4) **Profession of Architecture**

The profession of architecture is a legal body which grants architects an exclusive right in shaping spaces and is nationally controlled along with the monopolistic guild structures protected by modern governments. This profession is a production-oriented field of practice which was founded, in direct association with the demands of industrialisation in the nineteenth century, by the educated architects being organized against the craftsmen and master builders (traditional architects) and supported by the capitalist/socialist modern states (Larson 1977; Draper 2000; Wilton 2000).

(5) **Construction and Real Estate Development Business**

Subsequent to the implementations of the neoliberal policies, governments withdrew their support from public life. Parallel to the privatization of services, such as education and health, the profession of architecture has also lost its public role and transformed into a business being brought under the control of private construction companies, real estate developers and contractors. Accordingly, protecting the interests of private enterprises became the primary mission of architects rather than their own professional profits and the public benefits (Sadri 2013).

Following the loss of the social role of the modern state, the profession of architecture, as the by-product of the modern state, and its authority derived from its

public mission has been weakened and in most countries has even come to an end. Architecture which was previously functioning as an arm of the public authority turned into a subsection under the main sector of the construction industry.

(6) **Spatial Agency**

In addition to the effects of the neoliberal policies in dissolving the profession of architecture, with the main motivation of restoring the authority of inhabitants in creating their own habitats, spatial agencies have become the most crucial movement of de-architecturization in recent years. Activist organizations such as Architecture Sans Frontieres, Habitat International Coalition, along with the new fields of habitat creation and design such as permaculture design and transition town movement, could exceed the limits of the profession of architecture in various ways:

a. inclusive approach towards all areas of habitation and life, from food production to community-making strategies (invisible structures);
b. holistic approach and attention to ecological solutions, earth rights and usage of resources;
c. supporting and empowering vulnerable groups in creating resilient communities and habitats;
d. re-politicizing the field of spatial design;
e. transforming design field to a process-based horizontal cooperative and creative work which can deal with the process of pre-production, production, post-production (usage) and post usage (decomposition).

1.2 Conclusion

As it was discussed in the above text, the profession of architecture denotes the activities of organized, recognized and certified architects during the modern post-industrial era. As a result, the transformation of architecture in the post-modern era, particularly under the effects of the neoliberal policies, created radical shifts in the profession and its capabilities, structure, function and relationships with the other agencies of the modern society and state. While the power of the profession has been neutralised in the neoliberal era, the rise of the two new dynamics dissolved the function of architecture in the field of spatial production: The first one, commodification of the architectural profession and its transformation to a business, pairs with the neoliberal policies of the privatization of the state and public services. The second is the counter movement of resistance against the neoliberal policies and an attempt to empower people in occupying and appropriating the process of the creation of space.

Even though architecture, like many other professions, struggles to survive in this post-professional era, the real estate and construction industry destroys the

profession steadily. The exception is the few design companies which have enough capital to run only their professional design activities; all other architecture offices undertake construction works to be able to carry on. The real estate and construction industry employs most of the architects who cannot individually exist in this sector and utilizes them for profit gain.

Today, the profession of architecture does not have the capability to act as an alternative to this real estate and construction business, because it does not have enough political momentum, transdisciplinary coverage, bottom up implementation tools, cooperative process and public legitimacy. Our world's current problems need more active and radical solutions. Green architecture, sustainable urbanism and participatory designs are unidimensional and accordingly are naive ideas to confront with the generators of wars, environmental pollutions, and terrorism and extreme consumptions of resources.

Apparently, the profession of architecture and all the organizations related to it are becoming decadent, supposing that there is no need for such a selfish profession in our century.

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