

Architecture as a Tool of Social Modernization: Social Centers in Sümerbank Textile Factories During Early Republican Türkiye

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Introduction

During the 18th century, the technical innovations brought about by the Industrial Revolution in England led to the emergence of factory buildings as a new type of production space in architecture. The architecture of factories was influenced by a mindset that valued quick and continuous manufacturing processes over the quality of the work environment, shaped by capitalist ideals.¹ The rise of labor movements in response to poor working environments resulted in enhancements to both the physical and social aspects of workplace conditions. Thus, attempts to improve workplace conditions included strategies that culminated in the formation of company towns. They emerged, particularly in industrializing England, as spatial embodiments of utopian socialist ideals. One of the earliest and most influential examples was the settlement of New Lanark, established around 1800.² New Lanark served as a comprehensive social experiment, aiming to improve workers' lives through integrated systems that extended beyond mere production, encompassing housing, education, healthcare, and leisure. This spatial integration reflected the belief that social welfare and industrial productivity were not mutually exclusive concepts but rather could reinforce each other when planned as part of a unified urban and industrial environment.³

In the same period, the Ottoman Empire lagged behind the rapid industrialization in Europe, and the steps taken to reverse this trend from the mid-19th century onwards failed to produce effective results due to the lack of both sufficient technical know-how and adequate labor force. The leading factories of the period were limited to small production facilities. After prolonged regional wars within the imperial territory, the Ottoman Empire's involvement in the First World War put the focus on industrialization on the back burner. The Republic of Türkiye, established after the Independence War following the defeat in the First World War, which ended the Ottoman sultanate, concentrated on advancing its economy and enacting social reforms to establish a modern nation.

In the early years of the Republic, industrialization was seen as the most effective means of national economic development in Türkiye, and significant efforts were made to achieve this goal. Among the priority sectors, the textile industry held a central role, both due to its capacity to generate employment and its potential to reduce dependency on imported goods. To coordinate

1 Ivan T. Berend, *An Economic History of Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 59-60.

2 Sidney Pollard, "The Factory Village in the Industrial Revolution," *The English Historical Review* 79 (1964): 513.

3 Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres, "Company Towns: Concepts, Historiography, and Approaches," in *Company Towns Labor, Space, and Power Relations across Time and Continents* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-40.

and manage this process, Sümerbank was established as a state-led institution central to the implementation of the industrialization agenda.

Parallel to these economic goals, the architectural vision of the period was guided by the desire to create a secular and modern national identity. Unlike the Modern Movement that emerged in intellectual and artistic circles in Europe, the Modern Movement in Türkiye developed under state leadership and within an ideological framework. This movement represented not only an aesthetic or stylistic change but a comprehensive project to reshape society and daily life.

Across Europe, modernist movements emerged in response to profound social, technological, and intellectual changes in the early 20th century. In Germany, Peter Behrens and the Deutscher Werkbund advocated the fusion of industrial production and aesthetics,⁴ while Walter Gropius' Bauhaus School aimed to combine art, craft, and technology. The Bauhaus contributed to the institutionalization of modern architecture by promoting principles such as functionality, simplicity, and mass production. In Russia and then in the early Soviet Union, Constructivism aimed to align art with the goals of social transformation.⁵ Despite national differences, modernism in Europe shared a common stance on formal clarity, standardization, and commitment to a universal, progressive outlook.

Türkiye's modernization was a comprehensive process of cultural and institutional transformation, shaped by the prevailing modernization movements of its time. In this context, architecture, urban planning, and art became fundamental tools of the Republican project. Modern aesthetics, secularism, rationality, and national unity were mobilized to express these values, replacing the symbols of the Ottoman period with a new visual and spatial language.⁶

Modern architecture in Türkiye was characterized by formal simplicity and a rejection of traditional ornamentation. Its visual language, defined by rectangular windows, flat roofs, and asymmetrical arrangements, embodied the ideological clarity and functional efficiency sought by the new Republic. Prominent projects such as the Sümerbank factories, People's Houses, Village Institutes, public housing, and ministry buildings exemplified this architectural approach while also serving as agents of educational and cultural reform. Thus, the Modern Movement in Türkiye became more than just a reaction to industrialization and urbanization; it evolved into the spatial expression of a revolutionary ideological transformation.

Within this context, Sümerbank industrial settlements were designed as comprehensive complexes that not only integrated workers into production processes but also facilitated their acquisition of a modern social identity. The inclusion of houses, kindergartens, health clinics, and extensive green spaces aimed to promote physical and mental well-being, while social facilities such as employees' clubs and cinemas encouraged social interaction and personal development. Designed to improve quality of life and instill a modern identity, these spaces provided opportunities for recreation, education, and cultural participation. Thus, Sümerbank campuses exemplified a socio-spatial model in which industrial production was interwoven with the construction of a new, modern lifestyle for the working population.

This article aims to examine the role of social structures within the Sümerbank campuses of the textile industry in the context of the modernization and industrialization policies of the Turkish Republic. We focus on the function of social centers⁷ in modern industrial settlements during

4 William C.R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 11.

5 Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, (Washington D.C.: University of Washington Press, 2001), 148-49.

6 Important international collaborations took place during this period. Renowned professionals from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, such as Ernst Egli, Bruno Taut, and Martin Wagner, contributed to the design of public buildings, schools, and university departments, facilitating the transfer of European modernist principles to the Turkish context; see Bozdoğan, *Modernism*, 70-71.

7 Although social centers are referred to by different names—such as cinema, dining hall, club, or clubhouse—depending on the settlement and time period, they exhibit notable similarities in terms of their architectural features and plan layouts.

the early Republican period (1923–1945), taking the first six textile campuses of Sümerbank — established under the First Five-Year Industrial Plan (FFYIP) — as a case study to understand how the state was shaped through the framework of modernization. In this context, the article also analyzes how these modernization ideals were spatially articulated within the campuses. By evaluating the spatial organization, functional programming, and symbolic elements of the settlements, the research reveals the transformative role of modernization in architecture and the social life of the Sümerbank factory complexes.

Establishment of the Industrial Initiatives in the Early Republican Period

In the 1920s, Türkiye required a new economic approach. In this context, congresses were organized,⁸ legislative changes were enacted, and a new bank—Sümerbank was established.⁹ These initiatives aimed to encourage industrial investments and promote economic development. After 1930, the role of the state in the economy increased, and the government sought to stabilize the economy and identified industrialization as the most significant economic policy of the period. It soon became evident that Türkiye needed to implement a structured plan to achieve its industrialization goals. Given the Soviet Union's and Germany's successful experience in industrialization, Türkiye collaborated with them to obtain financial and technical support.¹⁰ Even a Turkish delegation visited the Soviet Union first, where they toured industrial facilities and gathered insights into the country's economic structure.¹¹

With textile production identified as a priority sector within the framework of Türkiye's industrialization strategy, a Soviet delegation was invited to the country to evaluate potential sites for factory establishments.¹² The delegation's report emphasized the strategic importance of the cotton textile industry, particularly considering Türkiye's significant dependence on imported cotton fabrics.¹³ The overarching aim was to reduce foreign dependency by developing a robust domestic textile infrastructure—an initiative that laid the groundwork for the FFYIP.¹⁴

Implemented between 1934 and 1939, the FFYIP became Türkiye's first comprehensive and successful industrialization program. In response, and under the directive of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Republic's founder, a new financial and industrial institution was established.

8 Afet İnan, *Devletçilik İlkesi ve Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin Birinci Sanayi Planı 1933* [The Principle of Statism and the First Industrial Plan of the Republic of Türkiye 1933] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1972), 9.

9 Faruk Yücel, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinin Sanayideki İlk Önemli Adımı: Birinci Beş Yıllık Sanayi Planı 1934–1938* [The First Important Step of Republican Türkiye in Industry: First Five-Year Industrial Plan 1934–1938] (Ankara: TMMOB The Chamber of Electrical Engineers, 2014), 12.

10 İmren Arbaç, "Türkiye'de 1934–1938 Yılları Arasında Yapılan Birinci Beş Yıllık Sanayi Planının Gerçekleştirilmesinde Sovyetler Birliği'nden Alınan Kredi ve Teknik Yardımların Katkıları" [The Contributions of Credits and Technical Assistance Received from the Soviet Union in the Realization of the First Five-Year Industrial Plan in Türkiye between 1934–1938], *Van Yüzüncü Yıl University The Journal of Social Sciences*, 64 (2024): 58–71.

11 Soviet support included the provision of essential machinery and equipment through credit, the preparation of industrial projects, the installation of machinery, and the training of technical personnel; see Yücel, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinin Sanayideki İlk Önemli Adımı*, 23.

12 Ibid., 24.

13 İlhan Tekeli and Selim İkin, *Cumhuriyet'in Harcı 2: Köktenci Modernitenin Ekonomik Politikasının Gelişimi* [Mortar of the Republic 2: The Development of the Economic Policy of Fundamentalist Modernity] (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2010), 223.

14 The FFYIP included key objectives such as establishing new industrial facilities based on locally available raw materials, reducing foreign dependence by promoting domestic production of high-import products, and ensuring that new industrial plants were located near raw material sources and labor supply while maintaining easy access to transportation networks; see İnan, *Devletçilik İlkesi*, 16; Yakup Kepenek, *Türkiye Ekonomisi* [Turkish Economy] (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2012), 68; Yücel, *Türkiye'sinin Sanayideki İlk Önemli Adımı*, 27.

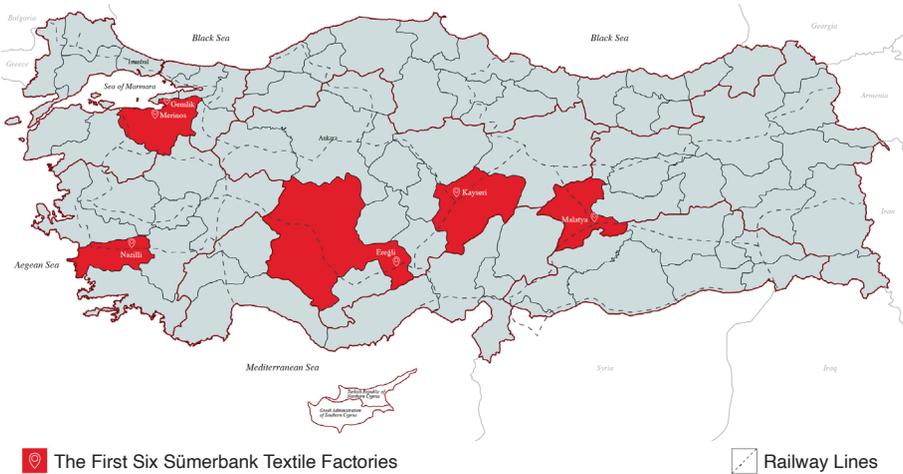


Fig. 1: Locations of the first six Sümerbank Textile Factories on the Türkiye map

Officially founded on July 3, 1933, it was named Sümer.¹⁵ The institution later became widely known as Sümerbank. It inherited and consolidated the functions of earlier industrial entities, becoming a cornerstone of the state-driven economic transformation of the early Republican era.¹⁶

Within the framework of FFYIP, Sümerbank played a crucial role in the establishment of significant textile factories across Türkiye. The selection of the sites for these factories was carried out based on a set of strategic criteria to ensure their long-term viability and efficiency. Key factors influencing site selection included proximity to raw material sources, accessibility to railway networks for efficient transportation, availability of a sufficient labor force, contribution to regional economic development, and proximity to energy resources. These considerations were essential in optimizing production processes, reducing logistical costs, and fostering industrial growth in various regions of the country. These strategic aspects guided the foundation of the first state-established textile factories — such as those in Kayseri, Nazilli, Ereğli, Merinos, Gemlik, and Malatya — which would go on to exemplify a new configuration of integrated industrial and social planning in the early Republican period (Fig. 1).

The Initial Sümerbank Textile Facilities of the Early Republican Era and Their Associated Social Infrastructure

Sümerbank played a pivotal role in Türkiye's industrialization process, not only as an economic enterprise but also as an agent of profound social and cultural transformation. In particular, the six major Sümerbank textile campuses established under the FFYIP—Kayseri, Nazilli, Ereğli, Merinos, Gemlik, and Malatya—were designed not merely as centers of production but as comprehensive socio-spatial environments offering an integrated model of living. These campuses were shaped by the principles of modernist urbanism and architecture, becoming exemplary manifestations of the early Republican ideology through their functional diversity, spatial organization, and socio-cultural aspirations. Furthermore, they represented cutting-edge industrial designs utilizing reinforced concrete.

¹⁵ The English equivalent of the Turkish word "Sümer" is based on the Sumerians.

¹⁶ Encouraged by its achievements, the government drafted the Second Five-Year Industrial Plan, which aimed to be even more comprehensive in economic and social aspects. However, due to the outbreak of World War II, this plan could not be implemented.

All six complexes were conceptualized as multifunctional units encompassing both industrial production and social life. Each included core production facilities such as the main factory building, power plants, workshops, warehouses, water towers, and administrative offices. These were systematically integrated with social and residential infrastructures: dining halls, kindergartens, hospitals, social centers with cinema and theater halls, sports fields, and housing areas. In this regard, Sümerbank campuses functioned not only as economic production sites but also as urban microcosms that transformed, disciplined, and modernized the labor force.

The selection of the cities for these campuses was based on a combination of economic, geographic, and demographic considerations. In cities such as Kayseri and Nazilli, the presence of railway connections and an available labor force played a decisive role. The location of the *Merinos Factory* was particularly influenced by the climatic suitability for merino sheep breeding, crucial for wool yarn production. Gemlik, unlike the others, was selected due to its status as a port city and its proximity to both Istanbul and Bursa. Similarly, Malatya and Ereğli were strategically chosen for their potential to support regional industrial expansion and to absorb migrant populations through employment opportunities.

To encourage workers to reside individually or with their families within factory premises, a range of spatial typologies with differentiated functions was developed. Across all campuses, master plans reflect a clear spatial separation between production and residential zones, connected through thoughtfully designed transitional spaces ensuring functional cohesion. Typically, a central green space featuring a square served as the entrance focal point, physically connecting the factory, administrative offices, and social units. Sports and recreation facilities were designed to promote physical activity and organized competitions. Notably, the Kayseri and Malatya campuses included swimming pools among the sites. Extensive green areas were integral components of the complexes, and the workers' houses often featured private gardens, enabling families to engage in small-scale agricultural production.¹⁷

Social centers were generally situated near the main axis and sports fields, accessible not only to employees but also to the broader public. They fulfilled a dual role by offering spaces for recreation while also nurturing ideological awareness and fostering social cohesion. The opening of these factories significantly increased employment opportunities, not only at the regional level but also across the country. Through these comprehensive factory designs, Sümerbank campuses offered a holistic lifestyle to workers while simultaneously contributing to the socio-cultural development of communities and fostering the emergence of a modern way of life. To better understand the design logic and socio-cultural functions of these social centers, archival research on Sümerbank factories was conducted, and architecture projects and period newspapers were analyzed. Spatial relationships within the factory complexes were examined through project drawings and visual materials, focusing on the location and integration of social buildings with other functional areas. Through typological comparisons, the positioning of similar structures across different campuses was analyzed, offering insights into the standardization and variation of design principles. These methods collectively aim to reveal how Sümerbank's social structures evolved in parallel with the broader modernization project of the Republic. In the following section, the factories are presented in the order of their establishment through an analysis of their site plans, highlighting their unique characteristics, and shared features.

Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory - 1935

The Kayseri Textile Factory, the first to be constructed under the FFYIP, was inaugurated in 1935. The design and technical support for the factory were provided by the Soviet Union.¹⁸

17 Ali Asgar Eren and Serkan Tuna, "Birinci Sanayi Planı Kapsamında Kurulan Sümerbank Dokuma Fabrikalarında Beslenme, Giyim, Kreş ve Okul Olanakları (1935–1950)" [Nutrition, Clothing, Nursery and School Facilities in Sümerbank Weaving Factories Established Within the Scope of the First Industrial Plan (1935–1950)], *Journal of Atatürk Yolu* 63 (2018): 167-68.

18 Halil Inalcık, *Türkiye Tekstil Tarihi Üzerine Araştırmalar* [Research on the History of Turkish Textiles] (Istanbul: Türkiye İşbank Cultural Publications, 2008), 152.

Several factors were taken into consideration in the site selection process. Its proximity to the stream made the location favorable in terms of meeting energy requirements. Kayseri's accessibility and relatively well-developed transportation infrastructure facilitated the efficient procurement of raw materials, despite the region not being a major cotton-producing area. Historically known as a textile production center,¹⁹ the city also offered a potential pool of skilled labor due to its traditional weaving practices. Other factors influencing the site selection included the region's flat topography, favorable climate conditions, and its safe distance from border regions.

The factory layout demonstrates a clear separation of functions. On one side of the main road lie the production buildings, social facilities, and sports and recreational areas, while the workers' housing is located on the opposite side. Uniquely in this complex, residential structures are situated both inside and outside the factory site. The housing units located to the north of the site were designated for workers, whereas those within the factory premises were reserved for administrative staff. Additionally, outside the factory boundaries, a technical school was established to provide vocational training for workers.

The entrance buildings of the factory with their tall columns create a monumental effect. Further inside, visitors are greeted by a square and the entrance to the administrative building. From this point, access to both production and social units is organized (Fig. 2). A railway line runs along the western edge of the complex, which is why warehouse structures, maintenance and repair workshops, and the power plant are located on the western side. The main factory building occupies a central position within the site. To the south there are guest accommodations, a fire station, garages, and various social facilities. These social amenities, which provided spaces for workers to spend their leisure time, were of great significance. The sports fields, swimming pool, and social center, often referred to as a cinema or clubhouse, are located close to each other and form a cohesive recreational space that has served employees and the wider community for many years. After the closure of the Sümerbank Kayseri Factory in 1999, its buildings were registered as cultural heritage, and the site continues to function as a university campus today.

Sümerbank Nazilli Printed Textile Factory - 1937

The Sümerbank Nazilli Printed Textile Factory stands as one of the most prominent symbols of the early Republican period's industrialization policies in Türkiye. Constructed as part of the country's planned industrialization under FFYIP, the factory was officially inaugurated with a grand ceremony on October 9, 1937.²⁰ Established by Sümerbank, the factory holds significant importance as one of the first state-owned textile enterprises, playing a crucial role in advancing the domestic industry. The factory was realized with technical and financial assistance from the Soviet Union.²¹ The decision to establish the factory in Nazilli was based on several strategic factors. Its proximity to the river facilitated water supply for production processes, while its location near the railway ensured efficient transportation of both raw materials and the finished products. Additionally, the factory's establishment was part of a broader effort to stimulate the economic development of the Aegean region of Türkiye.

Like other modern factories, this factory was not composed solely of production units. In addition to manufacturing areas, the complex included accommodations, educational buildings, healthcare facilities, and social spaces. An analysis of the site plan (Fig. 2) reveals that all units within the factory premises are connected by internal roads. The production-related structures are situated on the western part of the site, while the social units are located on the eastern side. Like other factories, the residential area is located separately from the production area, with a street passing between them. One of the most significant spaces for fostering social interaction among workers was the social center. The cinema hall hosted theater performances, musical concerts, and special celebrations.

19 Donald Quatert, *Ottoman Manufacturing in the Age of the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 61.

20 İnalçık, *Türkiye Tekstil Tarihi*, 153.

21 *Ibid.*, 152.

The social center is positioned directly north of the entrance buildings, with the administrative building situated to its east. These buildings are elevated and accessed by staircases leading to their entrances. Constructed using reinforced concrete, with metal railings and externally framed windows, the design reflects the minimalist architectural language of the period. It is known that various additional functions, such as sports fields, a swimming pool, and an open-air cinema, were located to the east of these structures. The establishment of the Sümer Theater group and the Sümer Football team provided social activities for factory workers, their families, and the community of Nazilli, contributing to significant transformations in social life. The Sümerbank Nazilli Factory was closed in 2002, and its buildings have since been registered as cultural heritage. Today, the site continues to function as a university campus.

Sümerbank Ereğli Cotton Weaving Factory - 1937

The Sümerbank Ereğli Cotton Weaving Factory was established in 1937 in the district of Ereğli, Konya, as a part of the FFYIP. Designed by German experts and constructed through German Turkish collaboration, the Ereğli factory was located near the railway line.²² The factory played a significant role in the district's population growth and urban development. Beyond its industrial function, the facility acted as a catalyst for social and cultural transformation through its integrated components, including social facilities, a school, and worker housing. The facility is significant not only within the context of Ereğli but also as a reflection of the broader vision of modern Türkiye during that period. The Sümerbank Ereğli Factory is the only site that is still used as a production facility.

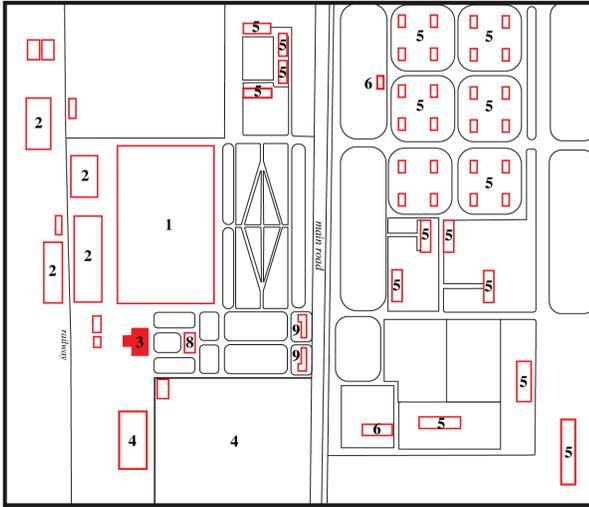
The campus comprised a main production building, storage facilities, ateliers, a power plant, a water tower, an administrative block, social amenities, educational institutions, a guesthouse, a hospital, recreational areas, and workers' houses (Fig. 2). The industrial section was positioned on the western edge of the site. Housing units were distributed across two distinct zones: one to the east and the other to the southwest of the complex. Workshop buildings, warehouses, and other production units were situated to the west of the factory, while an additional warehouse, a primary school, and a kindergarten were positioned to the south. The Ereğli site placed significant emphasis on recreational infrastructure. Sports fields were distributed within the premises, both to the north and south, and another was located just beyond the southern edge of the residential zone. A further distinctive element of this layout was the presence of an open-air cinema, situated directly north of the social center.

According to the factory's early site plans, the original social center was situated in the eastern corner of the factory block, though it was later demolished. Similar to other Sümerbank factories, the building was of German construction and included a cinema hall. In later years, a new three-story reinforced concrete structure reflecting the architectural characteristics of the period was built south of the administrative building for the same function. Unlike the Kayseri and Nazilli campuses, where the social center was located across from the main entrance and integrated with a square and green space, such a centralized arrangement is not observed in Ereğli. However, the building was similarly positioned close to the street and other recreational facilities, though it was notably closer to the factory building compared to other examples.

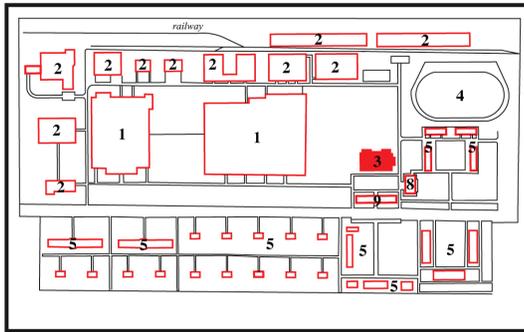
Sümerbank Merinos Woollen Industry Factory - 1938

As part of the FFYIP, two factories were planned to be established in Bursa: one for merino wool processing and the other for artificial silk production. The decision to locate the Merinos Factory in Bursa was primarily influenced by the region's abundance of water resources, favorable climatic conditions for wool yarn production, and its proximity to raw materials. This strategic choice eliminated the initial need for imported worsted yarn and enabled the foundation of a domestic wool textile industry capable of processing both domestic and imported fleece. Since worsted yarn production demands substantial water usage, Bursa's natural water

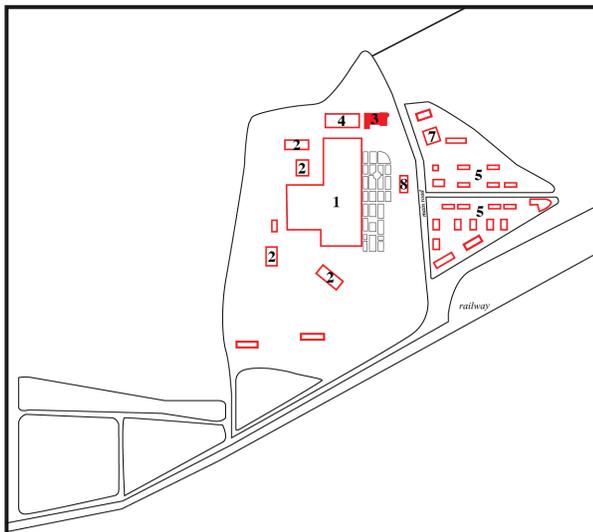
²² *Ibid.*, 153.



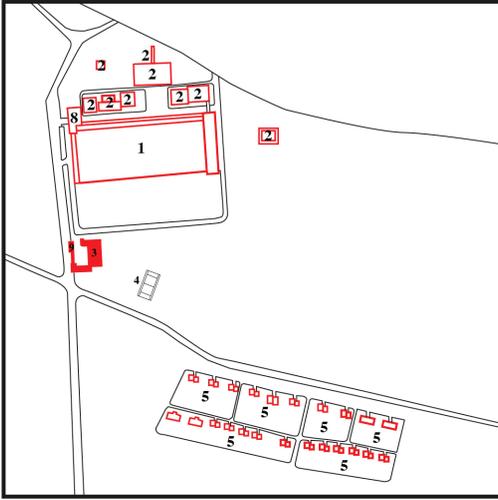
Sümerbank Kayseri
Textile Factory



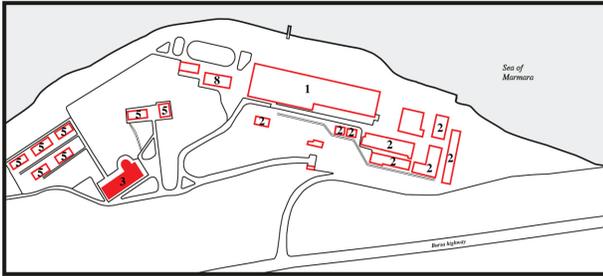
Sümerbank Nazilli Printed
Textile Factory



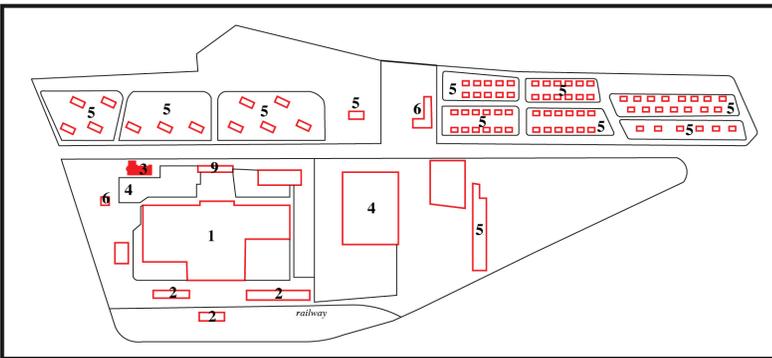
Sümerbank Ereğli
Cotton Weaving Factory



Sümerbank
Merinos Woollen Industry Factory



Sümerbank Gemlik Sungipek
Factory



Sümerbank Malatya Textile Factory

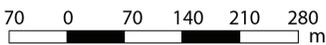


Fig. 2, 3: Schematic site plans of the first Sümerbank Textile Factory Complexes: [1] factory, [2] other productional units, [3] social center, [4] sportive facilities, [5] housing, [6] education building, [7] health building, [8] administrative building, [9] entrance building

supply was a key advantage in site selection. Furthermore, the presence of agriculturally rooted immigrants in the 1930s provided a readily available labor force. These populations transitioned into industrial workers with the establishment of the factory, facilitating the city's transformation into a center of industry. The technical infrastructure and operational requirements of the factory were supported by Germany.²³

As in other Sümerbank complexes, the industrial and residential zones are distinctly separated (Fig. 3). The production area comprises the primary manufacturing building, a power station, storage facilities, and a water-cooling tower. Unlike in Kayseri and Nazilli, where the factory structures are positioned deeper within the site, the Merinos facility places its production buildings prominently near the main entrance. The administrative block is situated in the northern corner, with all production-related components concentrated in the northern section of the campus.

Social facilities are situated to the south of the factory. This campus features various recreational functions such as a tennis court, a mini golf course, and a social center. Due to the Merinos Social Center's location on sloped terrain, the building is known to comprise a basement, a ground floor, and an upper floor. At the core of the structure are a cinema hall, a dining hall, and supporting service areas. However, the functions of the other spaces remain uncertain, as they have varied over time according to different sources. In subsequent years, the scope of the social facilities was expanded, and new buildings were added to the campus. The factory site was closed in 2004 and transferred to the municipality, after which it was repurposed as a cultural center. The social center building has been repurposed to serve as a venue for the marriage ceremonies of the municipality.

Sümerbank Gemlik Sunğipek Factory - 1938

The Sümerbank Gemlik Sunğipek²⁴ Factory was established in Gemlik in 1938 as one of the first industrial enterprises in the region. The primary reasons for this location were its proximity to Istanbul and Bursa, as well as Gemlik's status as a port city. The construction of the factory was undertaken by a German company, while specific technical components were supplied by Soviet sources.

The factory complex was situated on sloping terrain (Fig. 3), extending southward from the sea. The production buildings were positioned on the flatter sections of the site, while the highest point accommodated the director's residence and administrative buildings. On the slope facing the shore, residential buildings for workers were constructed, with a cafeteria located between the residential units and the director's house. The factory's spatial organization demonstrates a clear distinction between production and social facilities; the eastern section housed the production units, while the western section was allocated for social amenities and housing. The production facilities consisted of the textile department and its supporting units, including the power plant, storage units, finished goods warehouse, maintenance workshop, water treatment plant, ventilation department, chemical processing building, and acid department, among others.

To meet the social and cultural needs of its workforce, various facilities such as residential units, a cinema, an infirmary, and housing for administrative staff were constructed within the factory complex.²⁵ Due to the factory's location along the waterfront, water sports were incorporated as a distinctive feature of the site's recreational offerings, resulting in the establishment of a water sports team comprised of factory employees. In contrast, the emphasis in Gemlik was placed primarily

23 Metin Altun, Hasan Ünlü and Fatma Kesiriklioğlu, *Cumhuriyetin Kuruluş Yıllarında Bursa ve Merinos* [Bursa and Merinos in the Establishment Years of the Republic] (Bursa: Uludağ Üniversitesi Basımevi, 2001).

24 Sunğipek is a textile raw material produced from cellulosic fibers, first developed in the 1890s. Due to its resemblance to silk, it was initially referred to as "artificial silk." In 1924, the textile industry officially adopted the term "rayon" to describe this material. Owing to its versatility, low cost, and comfort properties, Sunğipek found widespread application in the textile sector; see "Rayon," *Britannica*, accessed April 3, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/rayon-textile-fiber>

25 Janset Özen Aytemur, *1930-1945 Yılları Arasında Türk Yönetim Düşüncesi: Sümerbank Örneği Üzerinden Tarihsel Bir Çözümleme* [A Historical Analysis of Turkish Administrative Thought Between 1930-1945: The Example of Sümerbank] (PhD diss., Akdeniz Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2007).

on the construction of production-oriented facilities. The social center was situated away from all the other units on the waterfront side of the complex, positioned to the south of the director's houses. As a result, its location within the campus differs from that of other factory complexes.

This factory played a significant role in the development of the Turkish textile industry. It was instrumental in promoting modern weaving technologies in Bursa and, together with the Bursa Merinos Factory, served as a model for industrial and educational facilities in the region. As a site of considerable industrial heritage, the factory remains a historically significant structure that has contributed to Türkiye's industrial and social history. The Sümerbank Gemlik Factory has also been used as a university campus since 2002.

Sümerbank Malatya Textile Factory - 1939

According to the FFYIP, the establishment of a yarn and fabric factory in Malatya was envisaged. The factory was officially opened on December 14, 1939. The first phase of the Malatya Factory included the yarn, weaving, dyeing, and finishing departments, along with the administration, social center, and hospital.²⁶ As with the Ereğli, Merinos, and Gemlik factories, the design of this factory was undertaken by a German company.²⁷

The Sümerbank Malatya Factory is the only example among other sites that has not survived to the present day. Following its privatization in 1998, the factory buildings were demolished, so information about the factory site can only be obtained from old plans. As in the case of other Sümerbank settlements, a clear separation between production and residential areas can also be observed here (Fig. 3). The complex included the main factory building, various production units, an administrative building, social facilities, sports and recreational areas, and an olympic-sized swimming pool. As in the other complexes, the residential zone was positioned separately from the production units. The factory entrance is located on the northern side, and, as in other complexes, a square greets visitors at the entry point. Directly opposite the entrance stands the main factory building, while to the west lie the social center, swimming pool, daycare center, and infirmary. The sports facilities are situated to the east of the factory.

A notable common feature of the social center in the Malatya factory, shared with other factory complexes, is its proximity to the entrance, which facilitates public access. Its spatial relationship with the open-air swimming pool further indicates the creation of shared spaces designed to accommodate a variety of community and recreational activities.

Comparative Analysis of the Architectural Layout and Spatial Attributes of the Social Centers

The social centers located within the first six textile complexes established by Sümerbank during the early Republican period present a unique synthesis of modernist architectural principles and the social policy objectives of the era. Despite being situated in different cities and exhibiting minor differences in their construction periods, these buildings display a set of shared spatial and functional characteristics, indicating a standardized design approach influenced by the development model. In all the examined examples (Fig. 4), the presence of other recreational spaces surrounding the social center suggests a deliberately planned spatial organization within the complexes. This arrangement reflects a holistic approach that integrates physical, cultural, and social activities aimed at promoting workers' well-being.

26 Özlem Arıtan, "Kapitalist/Sosyalist Modernleşme Modellerinin Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Mimarlığının Biçimlenişine Etkileri-Sümerbank KİT Yerleşkeleri Üzerinden Yeni Bir Anlamlandırma Denemesi" [The Effects of Capitalist/Socialist Modernization Models on the Formation of Early Republican Architecture - A New Attempt at Meaning Through Sümerbank Public Economic Enterprise Campuses] (PhD Diss., Dokuz Eylül University, 2004), 111-12.

27 İnalçık, *Türkiye Tekstil Tarihi*, 152.

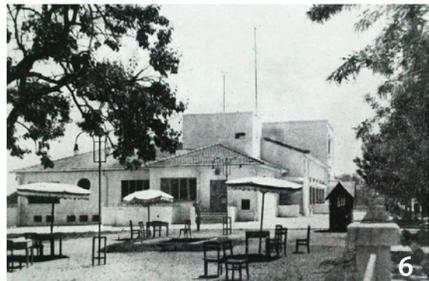


Fig. 4: Old photographs of social centers located in Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory [1], Sümerbank Nazilli Printed Textile Factory [2], Sümerbank Ereğli Cotton Weaving Factory [3], Sümerbank Merinos Woollen Industry Factory [4], Sümerbank Gemlik Sunğipek Factory [5], Sümerbank Malatya Textile Factory [6]

In most factories, the social center occupied a prominent position within the spatial hierarchy of the site. For instance, in Nazilli, the social center is placed directly opposite the main entrance, establishing a strong visual and functional axis with the administrative building and square. This configuration emphasizes its civic role as a gathering point and public interface. Similarly, in Kayseri, the social center is situated near the entrance, the sports fields, and green areas, forming a cohesive recreational and communal zone. In contrast, the Ereğli complex does not exhibit a central axial relationship between the social center and the main entrance. Instead, its social building is placed closer to the production zone, indicating a more utilitarian integration with daily labor routines. Nonetheless, its proximity to educational and other social structures reinforces its communal function. Gemlik, though developed on a sloped terrain, maintained a clear distinction between social and production zones, with its social center located in the upper, more scenic part of the site, perhaps reinforcing the symbolic value of leisure and collective life within the factory.

Common features across the social centers include a hall with a stage, a dining area, a club, as well as a kitchen and other support units, demonstrating a consistent and purposeful design strategy aligned with the ideological and functional priorities of the period. These centers hosted

cultural activities such as theater performances, concerts, and film screenings, where the social center was also open to the public on some days. In Malatya, the social center housed a two-story club section, and a centrally positioned cinema hall used for meetings and ceremonies, indicating its hybrid civic and cultural function. The Merinos Social Center, however, stands out functionally from the other examples. Located on the eastern side of the building were a guest accommodation unit and a sales cooperative; later, part of this area was reportedly used as an infirmary. Architecturally, the social center is among the clearest expressions of rationalist aesthetics.

The architecture of the social centers exemplifies the rational and functional spirit of early Republican modernism. Defined by geometric and cubic forms, these buildings reflect the aesthetic and ideological values of the period. Characteristic elements—such as staircases leading to elevated entrances, reinforced concrete structures, stone cladding or plaster façades, and symmetrical compositions—not only demonstrate a clear design language but also embody the broader perspective of a modern, progressive society.

Kayseri Social Center

The Kayseri Social Center, established as the first example of its kind, marks an early prototype of its term.²⁸ Located in the southern part of the factory premises, it was positioned close to complementary facilities such as a swimming pool, sports fields, and a guesthouse. Also known as the civil servants' club, the center, like other social complexes, included a cinema hall, club area, dining hall, and various service units (Fig. 5).

At the heart of the building lies the cinema hall, with the stage situated directly to its north. The hall is connected to other functions from the north, west, and south. A direct entrance is located on the eastern side, while an additional access point on the south connects to a group of adjacent rooms, which are presumed to have served more private functions, such as a small dining room or a rest area. To the west of the structure are the dining hall, a tea kitchen, and potentially part of the service areas, such as the main kitchen. This section is also accessible through a southern entrance. Between the dining hall and the cinema, a corridor connects various service spaces. The northern portion of the building houses part of the club area, where various games and social activities took place. The architectural layout of the Kayseri Social Center was designed to allow seamless interaction and functional integration among all its constituent spaces.

Nazilli Social Center

The Nazilli Social Center is located along the southern entrance axis of the factory complex, forming a central courtyard together with the administrative and entrance buildings. The structure consists of a basement, a ground floor, and an upper floor. The cinema hall is positioned at the core of the building (Fig. 5). The entrances are elevated slightly above ground level, creating a distinct architectural gesture. The southern entrance opens directly into the cinema hall. The stage and backstage spaces are situated to the west of the hall. To the north of the cinema, the structural grid of columns is visible; however, there is no conclusive information about the space between this column axis and the northern entrance. It may extend into the club or dining hall areas. Like the Kayseri Social Center, the cinema hall is lit by clerestory windows located at an upper level.

On the eastern side of the building, a space—accessed via two staircases—is presumed to have functioned as a foyer. Access was provided to both the cinema and the club spaces from this area. The club is in the northeastern corner of the building, while the northwestern corner is assumed to be the kitchen and dining hall. A staircase leading to the upper floor is also located in this zone. Based on the general layout of the plan, the northern part of the building appears to be allocated to functional units such as the club, dining hall, and kitchen. On the upper floor, part of the club area and a technical room are located, while the basement level was most likely used as a storage area.

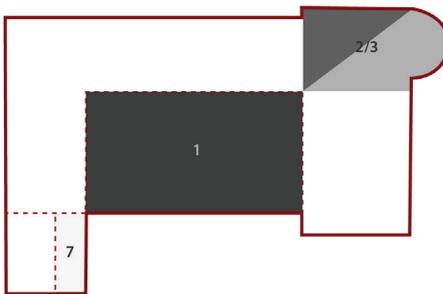
28 İrem Baz, *Conservation of Modern Architectural Heritage: Case Study of Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory Employees' Club* (Master's Thesis, Abdullah Gül University, 2023), 18.



Kayseri Social Center



Nazilli Social Center



Ereğli Social Center

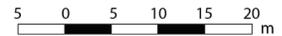
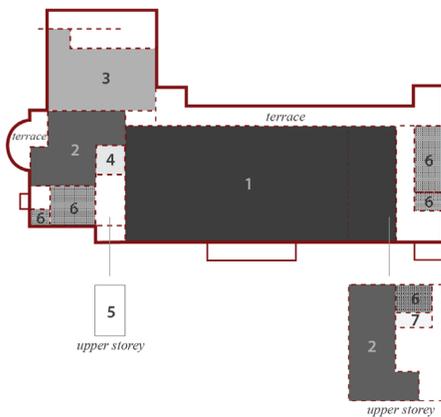
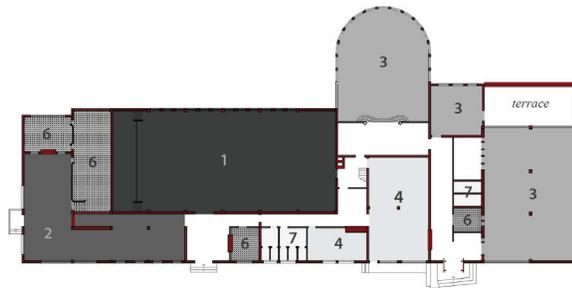
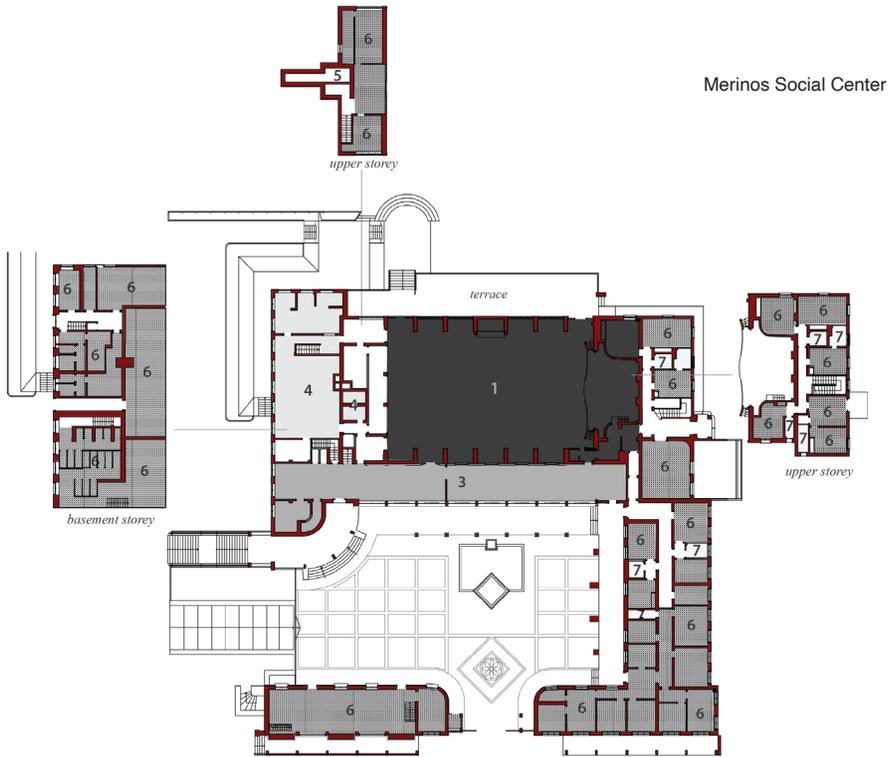


Fig. 5-7: Plan configuration of the Kayseri, Nazilli and Ereğli Social Centers (above); Plan configuration of the Merinos Social Center (opposite, above); Plan configuration of the Gemlik and Malatya Social Centers (opposite, below):

- [1] cinema/theater hall
- [2] club/card room
- [3] dining space
- [4] kitchen/tea house
- [5] technical room
- [6] other spaces
- [7] restroom





Ereğli Social Center

The original plans of the Ereğli Social Center have not been preserved, as the building was demolished at an early date. However, based on the site plan (Fig. 2) and historical photographs (Fig. 4[3]), the building has been interpreted in a more speculative manner. It was situated at the northern edge of the factory complex, close to the sports field. Its spatial relationship with the surrounding structures differs notably from that of other social centers; it was not located near the main entrance but was positioned very close to the factory building itself.

Photographic evidence suggests that parts of the structure were two-storied. The tall, vertically oriented windows visible on the southern façade are believed to belong to the cinema hall (Fig. 5). This supports the notion that, as in other examples, the cinema was positioned at the core of the building. There are two visible entrances on this façade. The western entrance appears to be connected to an attached volume, housing service units such as restrooms and cloakrooms, as suggested by the window type. The eastern entrance is assumed to lead to a space that may have functioned as a dining hall or club.

As seen in both the site plan and photograph, a circular form can be discerned on the north-eastern side of the building, similar to the examples in Malatya and Gemlik. This space was likely associated with the dining hall. It also appears to have an upper level, although no definitive information about its function is available. The presence of a terrace suggests that, as in the Malatya example, this area may have served as a club space.

Merinos Social Center

The Merinos Social Center exhibits a distinct character compared to the other centers. Due to its construction on sloped terrain, the building features multiple levels. The basement housed laundry facilities and other service units, the ground floor accommodated the main public spaces, and various rooms were located on the upper floor. The social center is situated north of the factory complex entrance, where the buildings are arranged around a courtyard that helps define the entry zone. As in all social centers, the cinema hall is positioned at the core of the structure (Fig. 6). Access to the cinema is provided via a northern terrace. A kitchen located on the western side of the building serves both the hall and the dining area situated to the south.

To the east of the cinema, there are rooms thought to have functioned as backstage facilities. The southeastern units—constructed as part of the cinema hall block—have been attributed with varying functions in different sources. These spaces reportedly served at various times as a cooperative, guesthouse, and later as an infirmary. Additionally, a separate building near the factory entrance, which helps define the threshold of the complex, is thought to have been used as an entrance structure and a shop.

Gemlik Social Center

The architectural configuration of the Gemlik Social Center, located in the southern part of the factory site and farther from the coastal area, presents a different layout compared to the other facilities. There are three main entrances providing access to the cinema hall, the club, and the dining hall (Fig. 7). The cinema hall forms the core of the building, sharing its central position with other service units such as the kitchen, restrooms, and a kiosk. The kitchen is centrally placed between the cinema and dining halls, designed to serve both areas efficiently. According to the available plan schema, the stage is located to the west of the cinema hall, yet instead of a backstage room, there is a space identified as a television room. On the eastern side of the building are the dining halls, along with their supporting facilities such as restrooms and cloakrooms. A specialized dining room, like the one found in the Kayseri example, is also present. A terrace that opens to this room is in the northeastern corner of the building.

One notable difference in the Gemlik Social Center compared to the others is the positioning of the club, which is situated at the western corner of the building, relatively detached from the other main spaces. On the northern side, like the Malatya example, there is a circular hall. It is presumed that this space hosted various events, particularly due to its location offering views of the sea to the north. The presence of internal staircases suggests that the building is situated on sloped terrain, with level differences resolved through vertical circulation elements.

Malatya Social Center

Since the building has been demolished and available resources are limited, detailed information about some of the interior spaces remains unclear. The spatial organization of the Malatya Social Center is based on the systematic grouping of functional spaces across the ground and upper floors. The ground floor houses public social spaces such as the cinema hall, stage, and dining hall (Fig. 7). Entrances are evenly distributed throughout the structure, and transitions between spaces are designed with spatial flexibility in mind. At the core of the plan lies the cinema hall, around which the other functions are spatially organized. This space served not only for film screenings but also hosted meetings and ceremonies. The cinema hall is directly accessible via two entrances from the northern terrace and one from the south. To the east of the hall are the stage and backstage areas, while to the west lies the Sümerspor Club. A circular terrace accessed through the club stands out as a notable architectural feature. North of the club is the dining hall, while the tea house is strategically positioned between the club and the cinema hall, enabling it to serve all surrounding spaces effectively. On the upper floor, the club, along with its associated teahouse and restrooms, is located directly above the backstage rooms. It is assumed that there is a connection to the upper level from the building's southeastern entrance. As in the Kayseri Social Center, a projection room is situated above the entrance to the cinema hall. While the facility primarily served workers during working hours, it remained open to the public beyond those hours.

Ultimately, despite the common principles, each center demonstrates variations in layout and spatial hierarchy. The Kayseri center, as the earliest example, sets a precedent with its strong axial connections and its placement within a larger recreational zone that includes sports fields and a swimming pool. The Nazilli and Malatya centers continue this pattern but emphasize more complex circulation systems and integrated terrace areas, allowing flexible public access and layered spatial experiences. The Merinos center, in contrast, introduces a courtyard-oriented scheme, bringing together the social center, guesthouse, and cooperative store within a unified spatial composition. Its club area is noticeably smaller, possibly indicating a shift toward more intimate or formalized uses. Gemlik, located further away from the coastline, departs from this centralisation: its club is located further away from the main complex and proposes a more dispersed spatial logic. Nevertheless, it maintains functional coherence thanks to the strategic placement of terraces and dining areas. The Ereğli center, though demolished early and analyzed through archival photos and site plans, reveals a spatial arrangement similar in core principles—cinema-centric design, multi-entrance circulation, and terrace spaces—but differs in the integration of topography and probable multilevel zoning due to its sloped site.

In all cases, the spatial configurations reflect not only a concern for functionality and recreation but also a deliberate effort to cultivate a modern civic identity among workers. The proximity of social centers to sports fields, swimming pools, and guesthouses—particularly in Kayseri and Merinos—reinforces their role in promoting a holistic lifestyle that combines labor, leisure, and ideological education. Moreover, the establishment of these factories and their integrated social facilities contributed significantly to local and national employment, shaping new urban centers and anchoring industrial modernization within a distinctly Turkish architectural language. These campuses became more than production sites; they were incubators of a new vision of modern urban life.

Conclusion

In the early Republican period, Türkiye's industrialization efforts extended beyond economic development to encompass a broader vision of social transformation. The establishment of Sümerbank's first six textile factories—Kayseri, Nazilli, Ereğli, Merinos, Gemlik, and Malatya—was not only a strategic economic move but also a bold attempt to reshape everyday life through architecture, planning, and public policy. These factory campuses were conceived as comprehensive environments where production, social life, and cultural engagement were tightly interwoven, reflecting the state's commitment to building a modern society. Moreover, the production of these factories was delivered to the public as high-quality and economical textile products through effective marketing methods. The influence of the clothing revolution, a significant aspect of modernization during the early Republican era, is also evident in the fashion designs offered by Sümerbank Stores (Fig. 8).

Moreover, these industrial facilities, resulting from notable global cooperation of this period, embodied modernist principles both in technological advancements and architectural design. Sümerbank's factories, built in collaboration with the Soviets and Germans, combined modern industrial materials and technology with a functional and socially driven design philosophy. In this respect, an emphasis on form over function is evident like in Russian Constructivism and German modernism. Across all six social centers, a consistent organizational principle can be observed: the cinema hall serves as the architectural and symbolic core. This centrality underscores the importance of collective visual culture and public gathering as tools of social cohesion and ideological engagement. In nearly every example, spaces such as the dining hall, club, kitchen, and service units are arranged around or in relation to the cinema hall, ensuring functional integration and ease of access between social units. In addition, the roofs of the cinema halls were designed using the advantages of reinforced concrete for wide-span systems. Local materials were also utilized in the designs. For example, in the social center in Kayseri, tuff stones were used as façade cladding materials. On the other hand, geometric and abstract forms were used in the architectural design of social centers. Bold, dynamic shapes, often with asymmetry and exposed structural elements, are part of the architecture. The facades have horizontal and vertical arrangements with simple rectangular windows that follow the spatial setup. In some examples, the mass arrangement is enlivened by including curved forms.

Furthermore, the impact of these social centers extended far beyond the factory walls. By integrating spaces for sports, culture, recreation, and social interaction, they helped foster stronger ties among workers, their families, and the surrounding community (Fig. 9). These facilities were often open to the public and played a key role in animating the social life of the newly industrializing cities. Moreover, the foundation of these factories significantly increased employment at both the regional and national levels, reducing disparities between rural and urban areas and encouraging internal migration toward emerging industrial centers. At the heart of this vision were the social centers—spaces that exemplified the fusion of functional needs with ideological aspirations. Though varying in size, layout, and location, all six social centers shared a common architectural program that included a cinema hall, club, dining hall, and supporting service units. This tripartite structure not only provided leisure and communal gathering opportunities for workers but also served as a platform for cultivating civic consciousness, collective identity, and public culture. The cinema hall emerged as a symbolic and functional core, offering a space for both entertainment and ideological education.

In this sense, Sümerbank campuses were more than examples of state-sponsored industrial production; they became work sites for the construction of modern life. Through architecture, infrastructure, and daily routines, they shaped not only the rhythm of work but also the contours of citizenship, culture, and community in the early Republic. At a time when debates on industrial heritage are gaining momentum, these sites offer valuable lessons on how social ideals can be embedded in the built environment to create a meaningful and lasting impact.



Fig. 8: Sümerbank advertising poster published in 1942



Fig. 9: Events held at the Nazilli social center



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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:

- Fig. 1: Schematic site plans prepared based on the site plan drawings obtained from the Sümerbank Archives in Ankara, Türkiye (prepared by İrem Baz Sözüer).
- Fig. 2, 3: Based on the site plan drawings obtained from the Sümerbank Archives in Ankara, Türkiye.
- Fig. 4: Images [1], [2] and [4]: *Sümerbank Xuncu Yılı (11.7.1933-11.7.1943)* [Sümerbank's 10th Anniversary] (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1943); Image [3]: Salt Research, H. Behçet Archive, 1937; Image [5]: Bursa Uludağ University Department of Construction and Technical Affairs Archive, 1953; Image [6]: *Sümerbank Malatya Pamuklu Sanayii Müessesesi* [Sümerbank Malatya Cotton Industry Establishment] (İstanbul: Kağıt ve Basım İşleri A.Ş., 1950).
- Fig. 5: The social center in Kayseri documented on site by İrem Baz; The plan drawing of the social centers in Nazilli and Ereğli prepared based on the drawing obtained from the Sümerbank Archives.
- Fig. 6: prepared based on the drawing obtained from Bursa Metropolitan Municipality.
- Fig. 7: The plan drawing of the social center in Gemlik prepared based on the drawing obtained from the Sümerbank Archives. The plan drawing of the social center in Malatya based on Aritan, "Sümerbank KİT Yerleşkeleri Üzerinden Yeni Bir Anlamlandırma Denemesi" [A New Attempt at Meaning Through Sümerbank Public Economic Enterprise Campuses], 138, 291.
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