

## **DATABASE: PERVITITCH MAPS**

**By Sefa Targit**

The difficulty of gathering data in Turkey is a fact that is voiced by everyone. It is clear that our Minister of Industry, Mr. Zafer Çağlayan, who has - so to say - declared mobility for gathering wholesome information in managing the industry of Turkey since the start of his office, has a clear-cut vision regarding the significance of this subject. However, the efforts for establishing a database which kicked start upon the instruction of Mr. Minister have not received sufficient and positive response. This picture is caused, among many factors, by the structure of the private sector and the existence of unrecorded employment in our country as well as the general attitude of all citizens who have been made shy of submitting any data or information to the government through long years of wrong practices.

It is essential to be informed and have knowledge about a company or a group or a country in order to manage or govern them. If not, efforts will lack a scientific base thereby yielding only occasional and coincidental achievements, which is indeed not always possible. Like all enterprises, the work of gathering information also requires strategy, plan, technical knowledge and resources.

“How many lifts are there in Turkey? What are the conditions and age of these lifts? How are zoning plans of new constructions?” If you fail to answer these questions in advance, it is impossible for you to make any plans for the future of neither your company nor your country.

However bad the prevailing conditions are, let's try to raise the spirits of those struggling to make efforts on these topics, by mentioning a past example proving that it is indeed possible to collect data in our country and offer the collected data to the use of common purposes if the needs are accurately identified and realistic recourses are put into realization.

It can easily be asserted that the most distressful, the poorest, the most sorrowful period our world has lived through is the years between 1914 and 1945. It was these very years, though, that witnessed a fantastic data-collection effort by the late Ottoman Empire and the young Turkish Republic under extremely unfavorable conditions when the resources were utterly limited. It will be a flicker of hope for us to know this breakthrough and be informed of its details who exaggerate the hardship of data collection efforts. We should remember that in the period we talk about, two giant wars have been fought and the great depression of 1929 has loomed the world, and what is more, an empire has collapsed and a new republic has been founded in the region setting the stage of the subject study.

Insurance activity imposed itself as an obligation in Istanbul starting from 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of huge fires devastating the City, which in turn motivated European companies to open their offices in Istanbul. But the foremost issue in insurance business is to be informed about the size of the risk; so these companies started investigating this subject through an

organization they established jointly. An investigation revealing all details about the structure of houses in Istanbul which an insurance company may wish to know was performed by the Company C.E. Goad between 1904 and 1906; however, this investigation covered only a very limited part of Istanbul. The real achievement came later by a study led by Topographer J. Pervititch between 1922 and 1945, which was carried out in the name of Central Insurance Association of Turkey. This study had been extraordinarily successful in terms of its area, quality of the information it provides, and its comprehensibility. Results of this study have been imposed on 1/375 to 1/5000-scale maps according to the size of the parcels in the study regions. Preferred code system employed for recording the information of each building onto the corresponding parcel in a map of this size is marvelous. For instance:

Codes indicating the type of structure were: k1 stood for (buildings with basement floor of ordinary massive construction, 2 wooden stories, but the roof covering not wood), k2 (buildings with basement floor of ordinary massive construction, 2 wooden stories, covered with coarse material), k3 (buildings with less-than 2 meters of ceiling height, basement floor of massive construction, and two stories above the level of pavement), k4 (buildings with 2 stories of massive construction at the side of the street, a wooden third story, and in the back 3 wooden stories), k5 (buildings with a shop on the ground floor of French vault with strong insulation, and the upper stories with separate and independent entrances).

Direction of the roof inclinations has been shown by arrows, and different codes have been used according to the coating: TF (Marseille Tile), t (local tile), ERT (asbestos-cement), TO (galvanized steel sheet coated), ZC (zinc coated), pB (lead coated), PG (tarred-paper coated).

For the number of stories and the height of the buildings, following codes have been used: GE (buildings with a storey-height of more than 4 meters), ET (buildings with storey-height of between 3-4 meters), pE (between 2-3 meters) ½ et (storey-height of less than 2 meters).

Different codes have been used for wall and window types, cantilevers and superstructures. These maps also showed fire hydrants, fountains and wells, open wood storages, alcoholic drink producers, bakeries, motors working with electricity, oil and steam, and coal storages, which can have an effect on the fire risks and fire extinguishing efforts.

The time devoted and the scientific methods employed during preparation of the maps minimized the time to be consumed during examination of these maps and eliminated any qualification requirement for the people to examine these maps. It is here that the success lies. We need to stick to this principle at all our deeds today too.

You need to find a building surviving from those times for being amazed at the accuracy and sensitivity of these maps.

I believe we need to take lessons and spend some time on what happened in this example:

- 1) As non-governmental organizations, why are we unable to repeat a similar study today, which had been organized in such distressful period by the Central Insurance Association of Turkey, a non-governmental organization of that date?
- 2) Nobody was bothered and complained about some Europeans measuring and exploring the city's every corner at a time when the country was waging its war of independence, and used this as a cause of producing conspiracy theories to block such a study. Where has this self-confidence and respect for scientific studies gone now?

I would like to thank writer-collector Ergun Hiçyılmaz who has made me aware of these maps and helped me to own original printing of one of these maps, and to the History Foundation of Turkey which has compiled and made a book\* of the surviving maps by the support of Axa-Oyak Company.

\* Istanbul at Insurance Maps, Istanbul ISBN 975-7306-73-8

*(\*) First published in Asansör Dünyası magazine May 2008 issue.*