

Coffee and Tea in Istanbul's Neighborhoods

Throughout his academic career, Sako Musterd has taken a keen interest in 'neighborhood effects', i.e. the spatial nexus of structural determinants of social actions and opportunities of individuals and groups.¹ One city in which such effects are extremely palpable is Istanbul, Turkey. Greater Istanbul comprises 39 smaller municipalities on both European and Asian sides of the Bosphorus. Each municipality has its own character: the population is distinct and each has a marked position in the wider political and economic landscape. As for the population, a particular set of features appear as proxies for each other and as such they strengthen spatial particularities. For example, higher levels of education, more progressive political orientations, more liberal attitudes with regard to gender relations, and secular life styles seem to coincide to a large extent, and they are particularly prevalent in municipalities such as Beyoğlu, Beşiktaş, Şişli and Kadıköy. The more conservative and religious parts of the working and middle classes shun those areas and gravitate to municipalities such as Başakşehir, Eyüpsultan, Kâğıthane, Ümraniye, and Üsküdar. A wide array of markers confirm these differences, one of them being the consumption of coffee and tea. How the everyday consumption of such mundane beverages help us to ascertain more profound social and spatial variations has already been demonstrated by Reza Shaker Ardekani in the case of Tehran.² In this short contribution, we aim at pointing to particular patterns in the case of Istanbul.

Historically, *türk kahvesi*, the famous traditional Turkish coffee cooked with water in a special small pot with a long handle, is served in traditional *kahvehane's*. Today, however, these coffee places hardly serve coffee at all, as most tend to serve... tea. *Kahvehanes*—often dubbed *kıraathane's*, *çay evi's* or *çay ocağı's*—are places where poorly educated men from the lower classes (and often from the same rural, ethnic, or religious background) hang out. They spend a cozy time with their peers, engage in cheerful conversations, smoke cigarettes or shisha if allowed, play card, *okey* (a kind of Rummikub) or *tavla* (backgammon), or watch television (notably football). The interior is usually simple and a bit austere: low taborets and chairs placed around low tables. Such more traditional places can typically be found in Istanbul's working-class neighborhoods.

Very recently, alternative coffee bars emerged at the higher end of the market. Most are small-scale, artisanal, and ecologically-friendly outlets for specialty coffee. Clients are served by individual baristas dressed in quirky clothing, a beard (if male), a bun on the head, and—of course—the necessary tattoos and piercings. The interior aesthetics are dominated by worn-out stuff showing raw materials and poor finishing. Bare bricks, rusty bars, and wobbly chairs of various shapes, they are all part of an authentic experience. Many of those coffee bars can be found in gentrifying neighborhoods such as Cihangir, Tophane, and the Beşiktaş Çarşı on the European side, or Moda and Yeldeğirmeni at the Asian side, and that is no coincidence. These upcoming areas in the

¹ Musterd, S. (2019) 'Neighborhood Effects in Europe', in A.M. Orum (ed), *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Urban and Regional Studies*. John Wiley & Sons.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118568446.eurs0217>, accessed August 23, 2019.

² Shaker Ardekani, R. (2015) *Polarised Tehran: Tea house vs. Coffee shop*.
<http://theprotocity.com/polarised-tehran-tea-house-vs-coffee-shop>, accessed August 23, 2019.

municipalities of Beyoğlu, Beşiktaş and Kadıköy are nodal points of hipsterism and alternative life styles.

Interestingly, there is a third type of coffee/tea places: international chains such as Starbucks, Caffè Nero, and Tchibo, and increasingly also Turkish chains such as Mado (Figure 1), Kahve Dünyası, Kahveland, and Espressolab. Their outlets serve Turkish coffee, tea *and* 'gourmet coffee' to a large clientele. Interestingly enough, these can be found in almost each neighborhood. It seems tempting to assume that such coffee places are frequented first and foremost by clientele of Western-oriented, progressive and secular middle-class people, but it is not as simple as that. It is a fact that the impressive economic growth of the past decades—boosted by deregulation, low interest rates and mega-sized construction works—resulted in an expansion of the middle classes in general. But contrary to earlier periods of economic growth, and now strongly driven by the business-friendly politics of subsequent AKP governments, today's middle classes also comprise the more conservative, religious part of the population. They live to a large extent in their own neighborhoods (in Üsküdar or Başakşehir sooner than Kadıköy or Beşiktaş). With the self-assurance that suits their new status, these new middle classes maintain a life style that resembles that of the regular middle classes in material terms, but distinguishes itself from them in social, cultural and moral terms. So, just like other middle classes, they enjoy delicious food and beverages in swanky cafes and restaurants. But they do so with their own aesthetic preferences, their own dress codes and religious symbols, and with own social manners expressing respect for religion, family and gender differences. Seen from that perspective, Mado in the secular middle-class neighborhood of Moda is fundamentally different from Mado in the conservative neighborhood of Üsküdar.

Figure 1. Mado serves coffee, tea and food to mixed clientele, picture by Jan Rath 2018

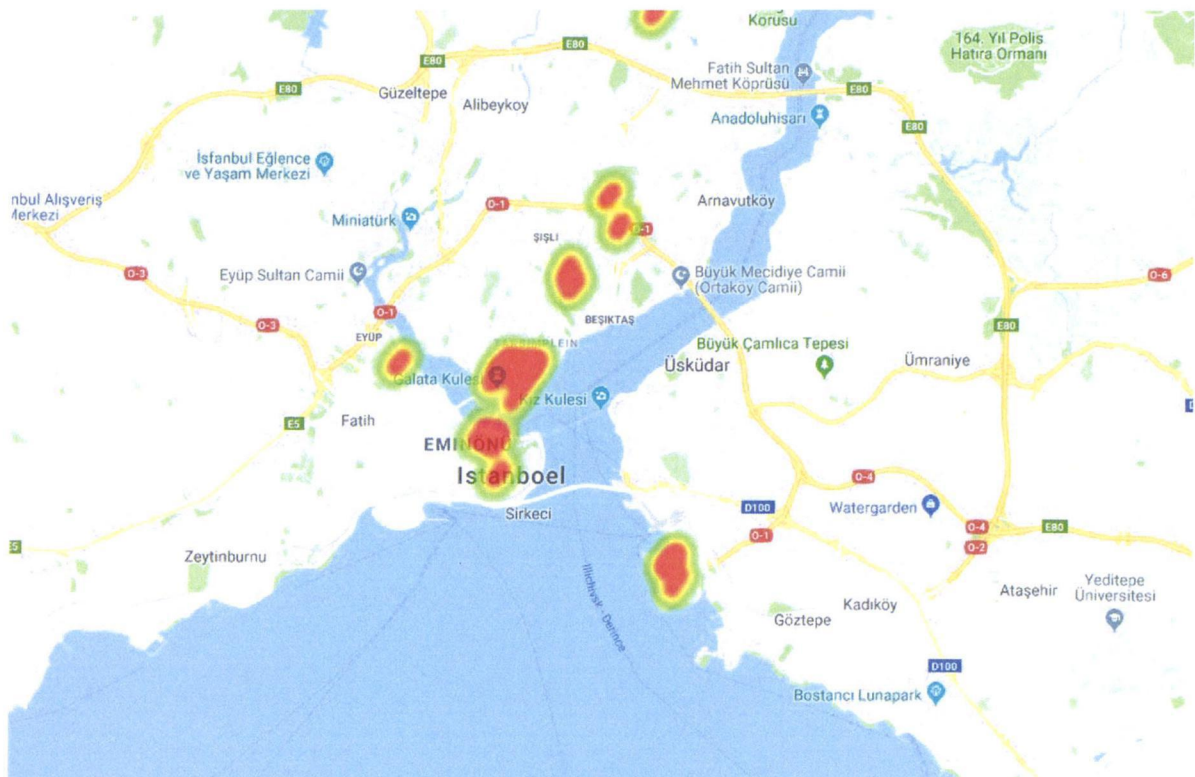


The spatial distribution of these different coffee/tea places (Figure 2) reflect the uneven dispersal of the population in terms of educational level, social class and world orientation, the way they want to relate to others, and the urban life styles they aspire. In poorer neighborhoods there are traditional

kahvehane's (rarely if ever) serving Turkish coffee, but most of all tea. Next, in gentrifying neighborhoods, there is a plethora of small-scale, artisanal coffee bars targeting modern, higher educated, and more cosmopolitan customers. And finally, in both lower and middle class neighborhoods, there are modern chains serving their middle-class clientele an assortment of products along a more or less standardized international style or a style that is somewhat adapted to the local taste and way of doing things. Dependent on the neighborhood in which they find themselves, both Western oriented as well as more conservative and Islamic oriented customers know what to expect.

Figure 2.

Hipster coffee bars in Istanbul, map data ©2019 Google, map prepared by Sander van Haperen.



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