

Public Drinking as a Transformative Practice of Placemaking

Merve Deniz TAK^a, Ayşe Burcu KISACIK^b

Affiliation: İstanbul University, Urban and Regional Planning^a,

Email: mdtak@istanbul.edu.tr^a, abkisacik@istanbul.edu.tr^b

Abstract

Global economic instability is reshaping everyday practices, with public spaces increasingly reflecting this transformation. As rising alcohol prices impact traditional forms of socializing, communities are turning to public drinking as a more affordable alternative. More than just alcohol consumption, public drinking acts as a form of placemaking, transforming streets into social hubs. This study explores the public drinking through “heterotopia” and “third place” theories, focusing on Dr. İhsan Ünlüer Street in Istanbul. Using observation method, the research investigates how the street has shifted from a space of transit to a dynamic site of gathering while also accommodating both unity and conflict.

Keywords: Public drinking, Heterotopia, Third Place, Place making

1.Introduction

Placemaking plays an important role in fostering relationships that enhance social capital and economic opportunities. The way the space is positioned, the location, the spatial attributes of space can be welcoming for new actions and eventually it constructs the place. Today, there are various theories about place, but one of the most significant focuses on maintaining social cohesion and fostering new social capital. As one of the most important examples, Ray Oldenburg published his book *The Great Good Place* in 1989 and stated that people have places 1. work and 2. home but beside them people also need third places to keep our sanity. As social entities, we need places to bond ourselves with others, or even nature. This third place theory became today's one of major topics in public space to remind ourselves why we need these other places.

1.1.Third Place

In the book, Oldenburg (1989) continues with defining attributes of a 3rd place. Firstly, these third places should have a neutral ground, citizens should be able to come and go whenever they wish. This publicity welcomes all groups of people in public space so the place is always open to new coincidences, and diverse groups feel relaxed to open themselves in this neutrality. Secondly, third place is a leveller. There is no barrier to enter these places like social or economic status, so the social hierarchy is not welcomed in these places. Thirdly, these places have engaging conversations, the primer activity in third place is conversation therefore creating new social bonds. The environment of these places encourages people to communicate rather than hiding in the corners. Moreover, third places are accessible and accommodating, they are open to all so there is no barrier to enter these places. Third places have regulars who make newcomers feel in a welcoming atmosphere and create more regular bonds in the community. These places' decor is warm and it stays away from making people feel like they are in a serious place like work etc. And finally, these places have a light-hearted atmosphere, encouraged with humour and playful conversations. To sum up, third places are such good options to nurture bonds in isolated society. Moreover, these places not only create social bonds but also help to increase productivity of societies by practising non-formal knowledge sharing (Fowler, n.d.).

Today, the existence of third places is more important than ever before for the ability of gathering people from different kinds of groups. Because feeling lonely is becoming a vital issue in societies with the increased usage of social media. According to a survey result from a Health Company in Australia, 41% of young people feel lonely when they see others' social media posts (Hislop, 2024). Likewise, it has been stated that social media has the potential to increase loneliness as it replaces the time devoted to social relationships in the real world (Jia et al., 2024). Addition to these effects of social media, today people are more mobile, communities are shrinking and isolation is increasing while socio-economic problems are emerging. That is why there needs to be more third places in the urban place and people tend to create their own places to relieve these damaging impacts.

In addition to these sources, UNESCO also supports the creation of third places by giving cafes as an example (Oldenburg & Christensen, 2023). Using cafes to work make them more than a place for consumption but also a place for connection, Oldenburg and Christensen claim. However, some states that the concept of third place is not valid for coffee shops since they have already evolved to a place for work (Sandiford and Divers, 2014; Ferreira et al., 2021). Moreover, if somebody wants to work in that coffee shop, proper outfits and some money to spend is mandatory, which makes coffee shops opposed to the idea of accessibility of third spaces. These debates show that third places have fluid characteristics and they overlap different usages from time to time. This function changing is actually connecting third places to another important place theory: heterotopias

1.2. Heterotopias

People want to see the ideal space they dream of in their lives, meaning they wish to reach utopias; however, by their very nature, these utopias are impossible to achieve. To avoid the opposing situations or threats of these utopias as much as possible, they have created heterotopias. Heterotopias, or "other spaces," were first mentioned by Foucault in his architecture lectures and later entered the literature through *Of Other Spaces* (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1989), leading to various speculations about urban space. Foucault used this term in a spatial sense, but originally, it was a term used in medicine for organs that are not in their proper place. However, after Foucault's analogical approach, heterotopias can now be seen in different fields, such as social sciences, where they are used in the context of migrants (Chambers, 2005; Göker, 2017).

Foucault explains his interest in spatial context by stating that the era he lived in had become the epoch of space. In the Middle Ages, spaces were divided only into religious and workplace settings or into urban and rural areas, whereas today, we witness simultaneous juxtapositions. According to him, these spaces derive their meanings solely from the social interactions they encompass, and based on this, he defines spaces as utopias and heterotopias. These heterotopias disrupt the continuity of everyday life, challenge uniformity, and sometimes emerge as unplanned spaces. According to Göker (2017), these spaces also demonstrate resistance against authority. This claim may not cover the definition fully when thinking about examples that Foucault gave. For example, crime stands opposite to an utopia and prisons were developed against the anti-utopian notion as the heterotopia by the authorities. So, heterotopia can be expected from every part of every culture. This brings us to the first of the six principles of a heterotopia. These principles were defined to distinct heterotopias because even though we experience them in the urban space so frequently, not every place is a heterotopia.

First principle states that heterotopia is a default attribute and every culture have its own heterotopias, which divides them as crisis heterotopias and heterotopias for deviation for primitive and modern societies. Foucault says crisis heterotopias are spaces created to manage the crisis, like exclusive, sacred or forbidden areas. He gives boarding schools for boys as an example since these schools hide the manifestations of sexual virility or honeymoons to hide "deflowering" of young women from the other part of the society. But in time, these crisis heterotopias have left their place to heterotopias for deviation with modernized society. These are places for hiding people who have deviated from the society somehow. Old age is a crisis according to him but in time it changed to a deviation and retirement houses are used to hide this deviation. Just like retirement houses, psychiatric hospitals and prisons are now places for deviation, for hiding one's from society.

Second principle states that the heterotopia can change in time with different functions according to different cultures. For example, cemeteries used to be in the centre, the sacred heart of the town but in time they were pushed out of the city and turned into other-place where people suffer their own miseries far away. As the third principle, heterotopias can juxtapose multiple incompatible places in one space and overlap them, like theatres or cinemas, places where we can see multiple scenes in one night from a box. Fourth principle of heterotopias is that they are most often linked to slices in time. These places can link ancient times with modern projects in museums or libraries, also these places can extinguish time temporarily or create new definitions of time, like festivals. Another principle of a heterotopia is they have the ability to open to penetrate and close to isolate others. To enter a prison, the person should commit a crime and need to obey the system or to enter a hospital, the person should be sick and have insurance. These are solid examples of penetration and isolation but Fouca-

ult also claims that there exist fully open heterotopias but in fact, deep down, they have invisible mechanisms that prevent everyone from penetrating the place. Everyone can get in these places but this is just an illusion for them, they have just been excluded. Lastly, heterotopias “have a function in relation to all space that remains” (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1989). Heterotopia creates two poles in the place: one is creating an illusion that exposes all remaining space, the other is creating another real space that is as perfect as our place is irregular, messy.

To sum up, both third place and heterotopia theories create revolutionary ways of seeing public space and they overlap from time to time in different places of urban areas. While both theories embrace some features of the constructed space, they indicate quite different approaches in some aspects. For example, fluid characteristics of a third place refers to heterotopia's 3rd principle, but at the same time, the welcoming nature of third places is contradictory to partly openness of heterotopias. From Foucault's examples, we see that there are numerous heterotopias and also third places, additionally, new types of them are emerging day by day with the evolving needs of society like coffee shops, even social media (Göker, 2017).

In the light of these indicators given by the literature, this study has endeavoured to search for an unobserved other-place for Istanbul. This other-place created by public drinking practices on the street has been analysed through observation and the intersections with these two theories have been examined. For this purpose, the transformation of two different streets from both shores of Istanbul into a third space has been investigated.

2. Dr.İhsan Ünlüer Street, Kadıköy

Dr. İhsan Ünlüer Street, intersecting with Kadife Street—Kadıköy's most famous drinking spot—is lined with numerous bars. However, most people purchase alcohol from a kiosk at the street's corner. Since the 2000s, rising alcohol prices and an inflationary economy have made dining and drinking out increasingly expensive in Türkiye. In response, this kiosk has become a gathering spot where middle-income adults get tipsy at a lower cost before moving on to their main venue. It has also evolved into a social hub for university students, offering an alternative space for those who cannot afford drinks in pricey bars but still create their own social capital.



Figure 1: Bars, kiosks and the flow of crowded

The observation study in this area was conducted in January between 9:30 - 10:30 PM, with the temperature at 3°C. Before arriving, it was assumed that the cold weather would keep people indoors and that the street would be empty. However, the results of the observation serve as clear evidence of how strong the third space created by Dr. İhsan Ünlüer Street truly is—the street was bustling with people.



Figure 2: People hanging on Dr.İhsan Ünlüer St. next to the kiosk

After 10:00 PM, people who bought alcohol from the kiosk spread out into distinct groups along the street. The densest crowd gathers at the opposite sidewalk of the kiosk at the entrance, and gradually gets spare further up the street. Every available space becomes a spot for socializing over drinks—even the staircases of buildings have turned into informal drinking spaces. University students, often dressed in dark colours, leather jackets, or second-hand clothing, stand in small groups. While they socialize within their circles, they also interact with others who share their broader social habitat. Sometimes people initiate conversations with strangers; sometimes groups merge due to the energy of the crowd and the social ease facilitated by alcohol. The street has become a symbolic space for these spontaneous connections.

On the night of the observation, a group of young people distributing food in memory of the late filmmaker David Lynch's death humorously reinforced this symbolism. It is no coincidence that they chose Dr. İhsan Ünlüer Street in Kadıköy for this niche act. A gathering place for avant-garde, non-mainstream, and marginal groups, this street amplifies social interactions not around a table, but on the sidewalk, driven by the courage that alcohol brings and the collective experience it fosters.



Figure 3: Food sharing in the memory of David Lynch

Young people who buy their drinks from the kiosk at the corner position themselves by leaning against the building walls. The sidewalk is designed to be level with the road, with bollards placed to distinguish the pedestrian area from the vehicle path. Despite being on the same level, these bollards seem to create a psychological sense of boundary for the groups, as their spread naturally stops at these markers.



Figure 4: Standing positions on Dr.İhsan Ünlüer street

The street accompanies multiple groups at the same time. These include individuals or small groups with 2-3 people who gather for pre-drink before heading to the main bar, standing groups of 2-5 who's next destination remains uncertain and crowded long term visitors that can be understood by their sitting on the stairs or the pavement. A key distinction emerges among these groups: their age. While this is not a surprising finding, it can be said that the primary demographic of Dr. İhsan Ünlüer Street's social habitat consists of young people aged 18-25. Although these young people are in space for a long time, they prefer to sit in a circle, closed off from the outside world, so the openness of this group is questionable. In contrast, standing groups, though often also forming a circular arrangement, remain more mobile and accessible to others. This mobility allows for temporary interactions—whether through flirtatious glances exchanged from a distance or through the chemistry of being

in a crowded (Baum & Paulus, 1987; Altay, 1999) space, where alcohol encourages temporary social bonds.

Yet, alongside this sense of collective belonging, this other-space also generates contradictions. Empty bottles are left scattered on the sidewalk, and groups sitting on staircases block the movement of residents, effectively occupying semi-public spaces and stripping locals of their everyday spatial justice. On the other hand, with the solution found by the locals, a completely different area is gradually being formed all over Kadıköy today: stairs with iron fences. These newcomers, who find a place for themselves as the others, create noise, dirt and carelessness for the locals. From this point of view, this heterotopia also evolves into a **place of conflict**.



Figure 5: stairs with iron fences

2.1. Dr. İhsan Ünlüer Street as a Third Place

These findings indicate that all gatherings in Dr.İhsan Ünlüer Street make this street a third place. Firstly, this street welcomes everyone from diverse economic and social groups, like student and middle-income pre-drinkers, and there exists no hierarchy between them. The kiosk makes the street a neutral ground for gatherings and drinking practice, which makes the street a third place as a leveller. Additionally, there is no physical barrier to enter the street. This street is accessible and accommodating for everyone (partly, due to contradicts between locals and public drinkers). It engages new conversations in a playful mood, as seen in the example of the David Lynch memorial. With the help of alcohol, most people are more welcoming than regular times here, but it should be kept in mind that people may feel more relaxed since they believe that they are with people just like them, harmless, standing just for a drink. As another evidence, this place is low profile with murals on the wall, dogs on the street, no extra effort has been made here. There is no clue of any regulated space feeling, moreover, vandalism through graffiti can be mentioned.

Apart from these, due to the methodology, it cannot be said that there are regulars in the place. Maybe bodyguards of nearby bars can be mentioned as regulars but they are not part of drinking / gathering activity. Besides, due to the methodology's limitation, information on whether they feel cosy and at home cannot be obtained. Still, other findings show that this street is highly a third place.

2.2. Dr. İhsan Ünlüer Street as a Heterotopia

The street is for accessibility at first, but in time, it becomes a gathering place temporarily with the help of alcohol. This juxtaposition is observed nearly every night in the street and in the day, everything turns into regular.

Indeed, this place shows the third principle of a heterotopia. In addition, this street might be a place for deviation for low income students who cannot find a proper place to drink which refers to the first principle of being a heterotopia. This time dependent gathering in the street may also change the perception of time especially for long standing people. The night has just started and everything will be decided according to the drinking practice, while people are having fun, time flies. For these reasons, the street shows the fourth principle of heterotopias. Lastly, this street has no barriers, everyone can enter and stand, it looks fully open but deep down, the person needs some qualifications to join this gathering. The way one dresses affects how much people are going to interact with him/her. If the person is too old, or too mainstream, it is a low possibility to feel like he/she is a part of this gathering. This reflects the fifth principle of heterotopias but when being open is the issue, this street never fully encompasses it. This partly closeness also brings new social capitals in the groups. When a girl looks at a boy who dresses just like her (with piercings and dark leather jackets), she creates her categoric knowing about him and being ready to know more about him. This prior knowledge opens up new networks and new relationships.

4. Conclusion

The initial motivation for this study came from an interest in examining the gathering dynamics of different socio-economic groups shaped by two distinct practices on either side of Istanbul: one involving alcohol purchased from a market/kiosk, and the other involving alcohol bought from a bar and consumed out on the street. On the European side (Ahmet Fetgari Street, Şişli), it was previously observed that a newly opened bar initially attracted young people and created a significant gathering space in front of it. However, after the field observations, the bar lost its popularity, and the street no longer fulfilled this gathering function. In contrast, Dr. İlhan Ünlüer Street on the Asian side has consistently maintained its character as a public and "third place" throughout all seasons. This continuity is grounded in the economic rationale behind the street-drinking practice—namely, buying the cheapest alcohol from the kiosk—which makes the space more sustainable as a site of communal activity.

Dr. İhsan Ünlüer Street has become the most famous street for public drinking in Kadıköy in recent years, thanks to its location and the convenience of the corner kiosk. With this high demand, the street has transformed into a potential space for various social gatherings. Its spatial characteristics—such as being right across from Kadıköy's well-known marginal bars like BİNA and Arka Oda, its proximity to other famous bars like Karga and Lal, and the availability of alcohol from the corner kiosk even after 10 PM—make it a frequent choice for middle-income young adults. These factors trigger group behaviour, attracting student groups who prefer not to drink in bars to gather in this space.

As a result of these gatherings, the street, originally designed for transportation, has come to serve a dual function: as a third place that fosters social interactions and as a heterotopia that disrupts conventional spatial norms. This dual identity highlights the fluidity of urban spaces. This transformation has created a public space that fosters the accumulation of social capital, which is essential for the continuity of society.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted within the scope of the Culture and Urban Space course at İstanbul Technical University Department of Urban and Regional Planning PhD, supervised by Assoc.Prof.Dr. Eda Yücesoy. We would like to thank her for her valuable feedback and generous support throughout the process.

This work was presented at the AESOP Congress 2025 and supported by TÜBİTAK under the 2224-B - Grant Program for Participation in Scientific Meetings within the Country.

References

- Altay, C. (1999) Location preferences of groups in public leisure spaces: the case of Likya cafe in Ankara. Master's thesis, Bilkent University.
- Baum, A. and Paulus, P.B. (1987) Crowding. In: Stokols, D. and Altman, I. (eds.) Handbook of Environmental Psychology. New York: Wiley, pp.533–570.

Chambers, I. (2005) Göç, kültür, kimlik. Türkmen, İ. and Beşikçi, M. (trans.) İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.

Ferreira, J., Ferreira, C. and Bos, E. (2021) Spaces of consumption, connection, and community: Exploring the role of the coffee shop in urban lives. *Geoforum*, 119, pp.21-29.

Foucault, M. and Miskowiec, J. (1986) Of other spaces. *Diacritics*, 16 (1), pp.22-27.

Fowler, A. (n.d.) Making a garden out of a jungle: The power of third places. *The Systems Thinker*. Available at: <https://thesystemsthinker.com/making-a-garden-out-of-a-jungle-the-power-of-third-places/>

Göker, G. (2017) Dijital heterotopyalar: "Başka" bir bağlamda yeni medya. *Selçuk İletişim*, 9(4), pp.164-188.

Hislop, M. (2024) The loneliness trap: How social media is making young people feel lonelier than ever. *Women's Agenda*. Available at: <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/the-loneliness-trap-how-social-media-is-making-young-people-feel-lonelier-than-ever/>

Jia, W., Liu, L. and Peng, G. (2024) The impact of social media on users' self-efficacy and loneliness: An analysis of the mediating mechanism of social support. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 17, pp.593-612.

Oldenburg, R. (1989) *The great good place: Cafés, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts, and how they get you through the day*. New York: Paragon House.

Oldenburg, R. and Christensen, K. (2023) Third places, true citizen spaces. *The UNESCO Courier*. Available at: <https://courier.unesco.org/en/articles/third-places-true-citizen-spaces>

Sandiford, P.J. and Divers, P. (2014) The English public house as a 21st century socially responsible community institution. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 41 (Supplement C), pp.88-96.