

## Exploring the Emotional Dynamics of Beyoğlu's Transformative Urban Atmosphere Through Music Ecosystems

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### Abstract

This study traces how music-related everyday practices have shaped Beyoğlu's affective atmosphere in the wake of spatial changes since the 1990s. Although emotions began gaining ground in urban research in the early 2000s, they had long been excluded or marginalised. Empirical research has often relied on methods that objectify emotions, rather than engaging with their embodied and affective dimensions. Drawing on field observations, in-depth interviews and sensory methods, this study proposes an approach that treats subject and method as an integrated whole—treating emotions as spatially entangled and grounded in embodied ways of knowing. Addressing a gap in the local context, it offers a case from Turkey and contributes both theoretically and methodologically to the expanding field of affective geographies.

**Keywords:** Emotions, Atmosphere, Beyoğlu, Music, Sensory Methods

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### 1. Introduction

The relationship between individuals and places is inseparable from emotions. Emotions may be conceptualized as a connective tissue that integrates the embodied geographies of the self with broader social and spatial formations. Emotions have long been marginalized in urban studies. Within the framework of Cartesian dualisms and modern scientific conventions, emotions were framed as irrational, subjective, and incompatible with value-free knowledge production (Bondi, 2009; Thien, 2005; Thrift, 2004). This perspective has been sharply criticized by those who argue that it replaces the complex nature of social relations in space with a logic of reproduction necessary for the survival of the system (Lefebvre, 1994; Hochschild, 2012). The emergence of literature on concepts such as sense of place and place attachment marked an early attempt to engage with the emotional relationships people form with their environments (Proshansky, 1978; Altman and Low, 1992). However, tended to reduce rich conceptual insights frequently falling short of capturing the full complexity of such relationships (Manzo, 2003). Since the early 2000s, however, a growing body of scholarship, frequently described as emotional geographies, has challenged previous assumptions (Anderson and Smith, 2001; Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Davidson, Bondi, and Smith, 2007), calling for approaches that “take emotions seriously” (Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2007) not only as content but also as method. Responding to this call, this study traces how music-related everyday practices have shaped Beyoğlu's affective atmosphere in the wake of spatial transformations since the 1990s.

Atmosphere is conceived as a space that mediates between emotion and affect or integrates them; and serves as a central analytical tool for exploring how place is affectively charged (Riedel, 2019; Anderson, 2009). In a similar vein, this study does not take sides in the conceptual divide between 'emotion' and 'affect', but instead uses the term 'emotion' to refer to relational, embodied, and spatially situated experiences that co-constitute place. Applied to the case of Beyoğlu, the term affective atmosphere allows the study to trace how emotional relationships to place are shaped and transformed through music-related everyday practices, particularly within the context of spatial and cultural change. In doing so, it offers a situated contribution to emotional geographies by showing how space, affect, and emotion co-produce one another through embodied urban life.

Viewed through the lens of emotions and affective atmosphere, Beyoğlu offers a rich and complex field of research. Despite the district's layered history; its central role in Istanbul's cultural, social, political life and its prominence in studies on urban change, nightlife, and music; research addressing the role of emotional and sensory dynamics in shaping people's relationships to place is still limited (Ural, 2017; Öz and Özkaraçalar, 2021; Türkün, 2021). Focusing on the period following the 1990 pedestrianization of İstiklal Avenue this research examines how music-related everyday practices have shaped and been shaped by the affective atmosphere of Beyoğlu. Pedestrianization of İstiklal Avenue initiated a period of cultural revitalization in which idle spaces were reclaimed by art institutions, bars, and civic organizations (İBB, 2023; Türkün, 2021). During this period, the district emerged as a major hub of musical and artistic activity. This period catalyzed the formation of the district's contemporary cultural memory and atmosphere, while simultaneously triggering processes of gentrification, spatial privatization, and intensified state intervention in cultural life. These shifts deeply affected the district's music spaces—its venues, informal performance zones, recording studios, artists' homes as spaces of both production and recreation, among others—reshaping music-related practices in everyday life. More importantly, they disrupted the functioning of numerous actors both within and beyond the music sector, and signaled profound transformations in the city's musical culture. These transformations not only call for a deeper understanding of how emotions are entangled with urban change, but also underscore the importance of studying space through its affective and sensory dimensions, alongside its physical or institutional shifts. In this research, the focus is on Beyoğlu not as defined by the boundaries of the district municipality, but rather as the area commonly evoked in contemporary debates and everyday personal narratives—an axis beginning at Gezi Park, passing through Taksim Square, Galatasaray Square, and Tünel Square, and ending at Galata Square, along with its many branching side streets.

This study addresses that gap by offering both a theoretical and methodological contribution to the growing field of emotional geographies, and by providing a locally situated perspective on the interplay between affective atmospheres and place. This research adopts an ethnographic approach, combining in-depth interviews, field observation, and sensory methods to understand how urban space is lived not only cognitively, but affectively. This article is part of a multi-layered research project conducted within the scope of my doctoral dissertation, carried out under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Murat Cemal Yalçın.

## 2. Literature Review

The marginalization of emotions in urban studies is by no means a new concern. Around half a century ago, a conceptual distinction between space and place began to take hold—one that emphasized meaning, affect, and emotional relationships with place (Tuan, 1974; 1977; Relph, 1976; 1985; Buttimer and Seamon, 1980). Nearly two decades have passed since emotional geographies emerged as a field committed to exploring how emotions are entangled with spatial processes (Anderson and Smith, 2001; Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Davidson, Bondi, and Smith, 2007; Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2007). Still, many of the foundational questions remain unresolved.

As the literature on emotional geographies has expanded, the growing dissatisfaction with representational approaches has led to a conceptual division between 'emotion' and 'affect' (Parr, 2014), often presented as a theoretical and methodological rupture. Emotions are typically seen as nameable, conscious states tied to individual subjects, while affect refers to pre-personal, non-cognitive intensities that circulate between bodies, spaces, and materials (Pile, 2010). This distinction emerged largely from non-representational theory's critique of the limits of language, reflexivity, and cognition in capturing embodied experience (Anderson, 2015; Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Thrift, 2004). This research resists such an ontological split. Instead, it approaches emotion and affect as entangled registers of experience, co-produced through bodily and sensory encounters that unfold within specific spatial and social contexts. Within this framework, the concept of affective atmosphere offers a way to rethink emotion and affect not as phenomena located within bounded individuals, but as dynamics that emerge across bodies, environments, and relations.

The term atmosphere predates its introduction into recent debates by Anderson (2009). In human geography, affective atmospheres are conceived as emergent, relational, and collectively sensed—hovering between subjects

and spaces, never fully subjective nor entirely external (Anderson, 2009; Böhme, 1993; Thibaud, 2014). Importantly, affective atmospheres resist reduction to either stable emotional categories or abstract affective forces (McCormack, 2008; Anderson, 2009; Riedel, 2019). They are registered through movement, rhythm, material presence, and bodily orientation—shaping how space is sensed and lived without always being linguistically captured (Bissell, 2010; Pink and Mackley, 2015; Sumartojo and Pink, 2019; Riedel, 2019). This study draws on the concept of affective atmosphere not merely as an interpretive tool, but as a central analytical lens through which the emotional and affective texture of urban transformation is examined. Rather than treating affect as pre-cognitive intensity or emotion as representational expression, it explores how these registers operate together in shaping everyday spatial experience. Affective atmosphere as a concept provides a way of attending to the dynamic, ambiguous, and often ineffable qualities of the change in Beyoğlu—especially as it unfolds through music-related practices with space.

Riedel (2019) highlights a parallel between atmospheres and musical experience, highlighting their rhythmic, mereological, and immersive qualities. A number of recent works that approach music practices and space through the concept of atmosphere (Riedel and Torvinen, 2020; Tan, 2023; Järviluoma and Murray, 2023) shed light on both the relational nature of musical practices and their affective dimensions. There is a growing body of research on the spatial, social, cultural, and economic contributions of music to cities (Behr et al., 2014; Martin, 2017; Van der Hoeven et al., 2022; 2023). Recognized as tools within international development and resilience agendas (UN-Habitat 2020; United Nations General Assembly, 2016), they play a role in city branding (Botta, 2008; Wynn ve Yetis-Bayraktar, 2016; Brunow, 2019) and contribute to urban economies (Florida ve Jackson, 2010). But one should not ignore the fact that while music-led development can foster urban revitalization (Kronenburg, 2020; Gibson and Homan, 2004; Jakob, 2013; Seman, 2010), it may also render urban spaces more exposed to market-driven dynamics and economic pressures (Bennett, 2020; Brown et al., 2000; Flew, 2008). When legitimized solely through its economic benefits, it may lead to problems such as gentrification and displacement (Gibson and Homan, 2004; Holt, 2013; Lobato, 2006). Literature increasingly emphasizes the need for urban policies, legal frameworks, and planning tools to address such outcomes (Brown et al., 2000; Flew, 2008; Grodach, 2012; Hitters and Mulder, 2020; Homan, 2010; 2017; Lobato, 2006; Martin, 2017). Although the gentrifying power of culture has been well documented, some studies offer comparative examples of legal and planning mechanisms that mediate the positive and negative outcomes of music in urban contexts. In the case of Beyoğlu, the failure of policymakers to implement protective strategies led to the loss of the district's character.

### 3. Methodology

Incorporating emotion and affect into social, cultural, and spatial research necessitates a shift in methodological approaches. Beyond conventional frameworks, the integration of perspectives such as empathy, reflexivity, and sensory or embodied ways of knowing into fieldwork has been widely emphasized. Edited volumes that aim to bring together theoretical foundations and empirical studies on emotional/affective methodologies (Flam and Kleres, 2015; Knudsen and Stage, 2015) also stress the importance of conceptual, methodological, and epistemological alignment. A range of conventional methods have been employed in empirical research, including surveys (Hubbard, 2007; Korpela and Hartig, 1996; Hernandez et al., 2007), mapping (MacKian, 2004; Lazarenko, 2020), discourse analysis (Ural, 2016; 2017; Bennett, 2013), narrative analysis (Tokdoğan, 2018; 2019), and interviews (Demirkol, 2023; Karmann et al., 2023; Tang, 2021; Bissell, 2010). Alongside this diversity, most studies focus on interviews to access emotions, drawing on participants' or researchers' observations. A significant portion of these studies adopts an ethnographic approach (Boğaç, 2020; Navaro, 2009; 2016; Ellington, 1998; Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Marilainen-Hyvaranen, 2016; Laurier vd., 2012). Given that ethnography can encompass multiple methods, its use in studies exploring emotions in space may offer advantages through its potential to integrate diverse research practices. Since this study aims to explore aspects of emotional experience that lie beyond what can be verbally articulated, the chosen methodology is expected to be capable of capturing atmospheres as spatially non-representable affects and spatial ambiguities. In line with similar concerns, visual (Duru, 2019; Wilson et al., 2020; Lorimer, 2010; Pink and Mackley, 2015) and sensory methods (Bingley, 2003; Wise, 2010), which foreground emplacement, reflexivity and embodied experience, will form the methodological basis of this research.

The design of my research on Beyoğlu, which adopts visual/sensory methodologies, is grounded in the principle that visual ethnography is inherently multisensory rather than merely visual, as emphasized by Pink (2001), adopts visual/sensory methodologies. There is now an extensive body of literature on empirical visual research (Grimshaw ve Ravets, 2005; Knowles ve Sweetman, 2005; Pink vd, 2004; Bates, 2013; Laurier ve Philo, 2006). In recent years, sensory methods have been increasingly integrated into spatial empirical research (Adams ve Guy, 2015; Crang, 2003; DeFazio, 2011; Garrett ve Hawkins, 2000; Low, 2015; Paterson, 2009; Urry, 2003). These studies are grounded in the idea that visual methods have a capacity to encompass embodied/sensory research.

As previously stated, this paper covers the part of a broader research project—my doctoral dissertation—that I have carried out so far, along with its preliminary findings. In my dissertation, I propose a research design that enables a bidirectional perspective—from today to the past and from the past to the present. The comprehensive study involves conducting ethnographic interviews with individuals from Beyoğlu and deepening these interviews through the photo elicitation method, using photographs selected from their personal archives to access the past; while to approach the present from today, I designed a participant observation process. At the intersection of these two methods, I aimed to create a space for re-articulating emotions related to these sites by walking through the streets of Beyoğlu with the interviewees and spending time together. The preliminary findings presented in this paper are based solely on the participant observation and ethnographic interview phases of the research. While the participant observation process spans the last year, my personal relationship with Beyoğlu dates back to the 1990s, and these past experiences have contributed significantly to developing insights into the space and making sense of my observations.

During this process, I made periodic visits to the spatial contact points, tracing them backward from the present, while also conducting general observations on the current state of Beyoğlu. I conducted ethnographic interviews with individuals who have longstanding ties to Beyoğlu, using various audio-visual materials related to specific places, times, and events. In these interviews, I recorded not only verbal expressions but also affective components such as facial expressions, gestures, and moments of silence, using both audio and video. During my visits, I focused on documenting the sensory qualities of Beyoğlu through my own embodied experience. I collected and analyzed all these data using MAXQDA, a data analysis software that allows for the systematic coding, analysis, and visualization of not only textual but also visual, audio, and video data in qualitative and mixed-methods research. I chose this software because it allowed me to evaluate my field and interview notes together with other types of data.

#### 4. Beyoğlu

Since its emergence as the new center of Istanbul in the 19th century (Üstdiken, 1994), Beyoğlu has been a space that has continually transformed under the influence of ideological, political, and economic dynamics, marked in every era by an atmosphere distinct from tradition. Beyoğlu has established a strong connection with the culture, arts, and food and beverage sectors, evolving alongside them and undergoing transformations over time.

In the decades preceding the 1990s, Beyoğlu underwent significant transformations due to political unrest and military interventions, leading to the loss of its formerly vibrant, energetic and multicultural atmosphere. The 1942 Capital Tax, Istanbul Pogrom, curfews, military rule, and ongoing national tensions lead to a significant decline in interest toward restaurants, taverns, and other dining venues, many of which consequently shut down. In the 1980s, Istanbul's urban spaces underwent significant transformation as part of neoliberal renewal campaigns aimed at integrating the city into global networks. In 1988, following mass demolitions, Tarlabası Boulevard was officially opened. Subsequently, İstiklal Street was pedestrianised in 1990 in order to increase the area's attractiveness for both the business sector and tourists.

The identity of İstiklal Street has changed significantly since the pedestrianisation. Although İstiklal Street was pedestrianised in 1990, it was still not a preferred area for many, its lower rents compared to other central neighborhoods in Istanbul began to attract “bohemian” individuals once again, who started opening cafés, bookstores, and stationery shops (Türkün, 2021). This movement signaled the beginning of a new period of revival

for Beyoğlu. The multicultural and multi-layered composition has resurfaced with the co-emergence of different actors (Erkut and Shirazi, 2014; Tekin and Gültekin, 2017). One of the more ironic and symbolically rich moments in İstiklal Street's transformation from the 1980s to the 1990s was the impromptu Sun Ra Arkestra concert performed atop a moving truck in 1990. Taking place shortly after the pedestrianisation of the street, the performance marked an early cultural intervention in an area that had not yet regained its former vibrancy (Url1). Through such interventions, İstiklal Street slowly began to evolve from a space of transition and abandonment into a renewed cultural axis.

In the 1990's, notable urban planning decisions included designating Beyoğlu as a conservation area, and classifying various parts of it as Tourism Development Zones (Güney, 2015). These policies contributed significantly to the revitalization efforts of that period and laid the groundwork for the developments seen in the 2000s. From the second half of the decade onwards, new types of cafés, bookstores, and music venues that were particularly popular among high school and university students began to emerge (Türkün, 2021). The revival of cultural and high-quality commercial activities on İstiklal Avenue also accelerated the gentrification of nearby residential areas like Cihangir and Galata, known for their historic building stock (Türkün, 2021).

Throughout the 1990s, Beyoğlu emerged as a key hub for both independent music scenes and institutionalized cultural production. Performance venues such as Hayal Kahvesi, Jazz Stop, Kemancı, Peyote, Roxy, and—toward the end of the decade—Babylon, became central to the city's diverse musical landscape (url3). At the same time, art institutions funded by private companies, such as Aksanat and Borusan Sanat, contributed to the area's cultural diversification on a more institutional level. Istanbul Jazz Festival played a crucial role in bringing contemporary music to the city, with most concerts at the time taking place in and around the Taksim area. The backstreets of Beyoğlu were rediscovered. During this transitional period, streets intersecting or running parallel to İstiklal Avenue witnessed the coexistence of workshops, cabarets, rock bars, and pubs. The transformation of Mis Street in the 1990s became an important symbol of the broader changes in Beyoğlu. Venues offering cheap beer operated side by side with artist-frequented cafés, maintaining a vibrant, mixed-use environment. Rock music and rock venues became nearly mainstream on İstiklal Avenue (Akay et al., 2021).

In the 2000s, Beyoğlu's popularity increased significantly (url3). This decade marked also a sharp increase in rental and property values. There was a notable diversification in dining, entertainment, and cultural activities. One of the most striking developments of the 2000s was the revitalization of the area between Galatasaray and Tünel. This area began to attract higher-income groups (Eder and Öz, 2015). The transformation of Asmalı Mescit, marked by the emergence of more upscale retail and dining establishments, drew many from the middle and upper classes to Beyoğlu (Ince, 2011). During this period, İstiklal Avenue experienced its peak in terms of tourism. In response, large-scale urban projects targeting these areas were promoted under the local government's vision (Adanalı, 2011).

Within the framework of Istanbul's selection as the 2010 European Capital of Culture in 2006, developments in tourism and the cultural sector accelerated. It has been observed that the policies implemented during this time triggered a rapid gentrification process along İstiklal Avenue (Türkün, 2021). As the tourism sector expanded and inflation rates—previously high due to the 2001 economic crisis—dropped, the real estate market in Beyoğlu began to flourish, leading to a sharp rise in property values. This, in turn, deepened the gentrification process, and many businesses were forced to close due to rising rents (Eder and Öz, 2015). The years following 2010 marked a turning point for the fate of many venues in Beyoğlu. A series of events—including changes in the district's vision, the release and subsequent annulments of the 2011 zoning plan, bans on outdoor seating, the enactment of the Turkish Code of Obligations No. 6098 in 2012 (implemented in 2014), the Gezi Park protests of 2013, the terrorist bombing in 2016, and the economic crisis—collectively triggered Beyoğlu's decline.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Beyoğlu underwent one of the most dramatic periods of silence and inactivity in its recent history. Following the announcement of Turkey's first official case, a series of nationwide closures and restrictions were imposed, severely impacting the district's vibrant ecosystem of restaurants, bars, nightclubs,

and cultural venues. İstiklal Street, once known for its round-the-clock activity, became nearly deserted, with most businesses—including those offering delivery services—shutting down. Entertainment venues were particularly hard-hit, as establishments with bar and nightclub licenses were not permitted to reopen even during phases of controlled normalization. Iconic spots such as Zencefil, Leb-i Derya, Anahit permanently closed, while others relocated or changed ownership. The collapse of this cultural infrastructure deeply affected musicians within the nightlife economy, many of whom lacked access to government support mechanisms. Reports of widespread financial hardship and even suicides among musicians revealed the depth of the crisis.

Since the early 2000s, Turkey has been governed by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and during this period, Beyoğlu was consistently administered by AKP-affiliated mayors. Especially over the last fifteen years, the transformations discussed in this section were largely shaped by interventions jointly implemented by the central government and the local municipality, often reflecting a shared political vision. In the 2024 local elections, a notable shift occurred when the district was won by İnan Güney, the candidate of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). This political change was interpreted by many people of Beyoğlu as a sign of emerging expectations for a different model of local governance, one that might be more responsive to the area's cultural diversity and civic demands. Post-election celebrations, including street parties and widespread engagement on social media, pointed to a renewed public interest in Beyoğlu's potential and a hopeful re-engagement with its urban life.

### **5. Belonging, Creativity, and Cultural Continuity in Beyoğlu: Everyday Practices, Musical Spaces, and Affective Memory**

Participant narratives reveal that the sense of belonging to Beyoğlu is not solely constructed through frequency of visits or physical proximity, but rather through everyday practices, emotional orientations, and social encounters. Especially during high school and university years—when daily responsibilities were minimal—Beyoğlu emerged as a space that was repeatedly visited, intuitively navigated, and eventually felt “like home.” Expressions such as “the place I spent the most time outside home,” “more than at home itself,” or “like my own neighborhood” positioned Beyoğlu as an extension of everyday life. A participant whose actual residence was neither located within the administrative boundaries of Beyoğlu nor in a neighborhood typically associated with proximity to İstiklal Avenue nonetheless described the area as “very close to our home,” referring to it as “like our street.” This account illustrates how strong affective attachments can reshape spatial perception, producing a sense of proximity that is emotionally rather than geographically grounded. The statement “we would sit and drink beer in front of one of its apartment buildings” illustrates a strong sense of spatial appropriation. The same participant recalled, “I once left saying I was going to the corner shop, but ended up just going there, wandering around in my flip-flops and shorts. We wouldn't do anything. We'd go there for the sake of going.” This non-instrumental orientation was further articulated through the analogy: “It's like going home—you don't know exactly what you'll do in which room, but you go anyway.”

Experiences of Beyoğlu often lacked clearly defined spatial boundaries. While İstiklal Avenue appeared as a shared axis, participants' spatial practices extended into surrounding side streets and informal gathering spots. “We spent a lot of time on the streets... the streets were much freer,” one noted. Spaces such as the steps near the Galatasaray public bath, in front of TRT, or the backstreets were remembered not as places of consumption but of lingering, inhabiting, and informal interaction. Social ties were sometimes formed with those working in these venues: “We would go to places because people working there became our friends.” The sense of belonging varied across micro-locations in Beyoğlu. The Tünel-Asmalımescit area was often perceived as “posh” and associated with adulthood, whereas the axis between Taksim Square, Galatasaray High School, and Odakule felt more comfortable and familiar. The presence of “our people” in certain areas—an expression used by the participant—was a strong determinant of emotional attachment, reinforcing a form of socially coded spatial orientation.

Beyoğlu was not only a place for socializing but also for solitude, self-reflection, and escape from daily routine. Visits to Beyoğlu were often spontaneous and purposeless. The metaphor of “going home without knowing

what you'll do there" illustrates how the attachment was grounded in a habitual rhythm. Encountering someone familiar or remaining alone were equally plausible outcomes, and this ambiguity did not weaken one's sense of place. Activities described as "aimless wandering" or "going to loiter" positioned Beyoğlu as a space of open-ended potential, not limited to consumption. Participants described their navigations as shaped by an embodied familiarity: "knowing where to look" or "having nowhere else to go." The social encounters forged in this context often transcended the immediate moment, reemerging in later life phases and shaping enduring personal or romantic relationships. Shared memories of Beyoğlu, its venues, and the people within them acted as a unifying emotional reference point, even long after the spatial context had changed.

Another affective tone is the sense of safety. However, this sense of security did not stem from institutional infrastructure or formal policing, but from familiarity and emotional resonance with the space. "I never had any problems—I didn't even consider that I might," one participant remarked. While participants did not deny that negative incidents occurred, they generally framed them as exceptions rather than generalizations. Words like "my people were there" described a social landscape composed of familiar, unnamed faces. One participant referred to a man known by many as "Sedat Abi," a homeless figure who was widely recognized in the neighborhood and affectionately described as "everyone's Sedat Abi." He was nonetheless attentive to others, once asking the participant if something was wrong when they appeared upset. This anecdote exemplifies a horizontal form of care and social cohesion grounded in everyday familiarity and mutual recognition. For individuals with non-normative appearances or lifestyles, Beyoğlu functioned as a rare zone where their presence was not policed: "If you went to Ümraniye dressed like a punk, people would stare or say things, but in Beyoğlu you could express yourself freely." In this sense, safety was not just about avoiding harm, but about the right to be seen without judgment. In a similar vein, Beyoğlu also served as a site of personal formation. It functioned as a "laboratory" for experimenting with tastes, interests, and identity orientations. One participant described themselves as "formless," initially attracted to "a bit of an 'apaçi' aesthetic," underscoring Beyoğlu's role in processes of aesthetic and social discovery. Yet this process of "finding oneself" was never purely individual—it was shaped by spatial affordances and limitations. The participant noted, "you need to find the part that includes you," suggesting that inclusivity was not evenly distributed. Places like Asmalımescit were never experienced as accessible or welcoming, revealing the classed and culturally coded exclusions that coexisted within the broader inclusivity of Beyoğlu. Over time, this spatial learning led to a form of confidence—knowing "where to go, what to do there, and what I liked"—which reflected not only a stable relationship with place, but also a solidified relationship with the self.

All these layers of experience converge in a distinction participants make between merely "being in Beyoğlu" and "truly going there." The latter implied not a momentary or instrumental visit but a sustained, repetitive, and immersive engagement with the space. This pattern, often interrupted by life changes such as relocation or the pandemic, was most severely disrupted by the shrinking diversity of venues and increasing inaccessibility. Participants mourned the loss of spontaneity and mobility between venues, noting that today's Beyoğlu often resembles "a tunnel of memories." The shift from lived to remembered experience coincided with the gentrification of previously accessible spaces. Venues once defined by low cost and openness had either closed or been replaced by fine-dining restaurants and boutique shops. "Many places feel like souvenir shops now," one participant said, underlining the transformation from dynamic, relational space to commercial spectacle.

Within this broader context, music emerges as a particularly powerful medium through which cultural engagement and personal transformation were made possible. Participant narratives reveal that Beyoğlu was not merely a space where music was consumed as a listener, but also a site where music production, creative expression, and personal transformation were directly experienced. Particularly during high school and university years, practices such as renting studios went beyond casual engagement and evolved into collective forms of production. These studios were not simply rental spaces offering technical equipment; they functioned as expressive environments where observational learning, and the right to make noise were actively explored. Statements such as "We did everything there—someone would play guitar, someone else would just sit in the corner, but we were there" emphasize the value of being present, spending time together, and learning collectively just as much as producing music itself. Participants noted that the development of similar musical tastes occurred

through shared aesthetic preferences and the places they frequented together. The expression “We used to go there not knowing who we might run into” underscores the culturally generative nature of Beyoğlu’s encounter regime, which was not only social but also directional. The relatively low cost of studio rental, the shared nature of expenses, and the accessibility of music production rendered Beyoğlu an inclusive space not only physically, but also economically and affectively. Participants’ recollections highlight how Beyoğlu once offered not only physical but also economic inclusion. Moreover, the density of opportunities for spontaneous encounters directly shaped individual musical orientations. Listening to similar genres was not merely an aesthetic preference but was enabled by shared spatial trajectories and a broader regime of encounters. These moments—whether a spontaneous street interaction with Harun Tekin, an unposed photograph taken by Ara Güler, or an unexpected meeting with a musician in a studio—were not simply memories, but affective and cultural inflection points that contributed to the formation of identity and orientation. Over time, however, these dynamics began to shift. Processes of gentrification, genre transformations, institutionalization, and rising economic thresholds rendered these spaces more exclusive, more expensive, and less accessible. Although emotional attachments to the past persist, participants noted that spontaneous encounters and unplanned creative production have diminished. In this context, Beyoğlu continues to exist not only as a former site of cultural creation but also as a cultural potential that persists in memory.

The types of music participants connected with were shaped by the diversity of genres and styles that Beyoğlu made accessible. Particularly in their youth, connections with punk, rock, metal, and other alternative subgenres were formative in shaping both individual identities and interactions within social groups. Participants reported that their musical preferences evolved over time, often in parallel with shifts in their spatial circulation and vice-versa.

These experiences contributed to a shared spatial memory of venues that left collective traces: places like Yeni Melek, Haymatlos, GarajIstanbul, Karınca, Klan, Ağaç Ev, Ghetto, and Dorock were not only concert spaces, but also stages for everyday socializing, relationships, discovery, and the formation of belonging. Some venues, such as Klan—where high schoolers gathered on Fridays, surrounded by film posters and drinking banana-flavored instant coffee—offered tangible expressions of “alternative” identities in everyday life. Participants’ continued emotional connection to the songs they once listened to—felt with the same intensity today—demonstrates that their musical engagement was not limited to personal taste. Rather, it was grounded in spatial, cultural, and affective continuity. This continuity persists, even as spaces themselves change, sustained by the power of memory and the affective force of remembering.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has explored how the emotional and sensory dimensions of everyday musical practices shape and are shaped by the transforming urban atmosphere of Beyoğlu. By foregrounding the role of emotions not only as content but also as method, it contributes to the expanding field of emotional geographies with a situated, multisensory perspective. Through participant observation and ethnographic interviews, it becomes evident that Beyoğlu has functioned not merely as a spatial backdrop, but as a relational and affective environment where belonging, identity formation, and cultural expression are co-produced.

Participants’ narratives reveal that musical engagement in Beyoğlu operated as a mode of spatial appropriation, emotional continuity, and collective meaning-making. As informal musical encounters, studio practices, and venue-based interactions became increasingly constrained by gentrification, economic pressures, and political interventions, the district’s affective atmosphere also shifted—moving from a lived, inclusive openness toward a more fragmented and nostalgic terrain. Yet, the persistence of affective memory, and the emotional intensity associated with past spatial rhythms, indicates that place continues to exert influence even after its physical and social textures have changed.

Methodologically, this research demonstrates the value of integrating sensory and visual approaches in capturing the elusive qualities of urban transformation. The concept of affective atmosphere—neither wholly repre-

sentational nor entirely pre-cognitive—proves to be a productive lens for tracing how emotions circulate through bodies, places, and practices.

In sum, Beyoğlu's musical past is not simply remembered; it is felt, embodied, and enacted through emotional orientations that endure beyond spatial loss. The findings not only illuminate how music and place co-construct affective geographies, but also underscore the need for urban scholarship to engage with the ephemeral, affective, and embodied layers of spatial experience—particularly in contexts marked by cultural displacement and contested memory.

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