Review

How do coffeehouses create a third place for international students: Hookah Lounge and Coffeehouse as case study

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This paper examines the coffeehouse's role in creating and facilitating a third place for international students at the USA Universities. It is an attempt to identify Hookah Coffeehouse, a coffeehouse which is located near Cleveland State Campus in Ohio, as a third place that become part of the Cleveland State University international students cultural landscape and to shed light on its role in fostering social life among them. Hookah as an illustrative case, this report presents and analyzes the social, spatial, and cultural aspects that create a third place for international students at Cleveland State University. The paper shows how these social aspects change private space to become public place. The conclusions point to the dynamic and the elastic nature of social places as expressed in specific cultural contexts of the international students who are studying and living in Cleveland.

Keywords: Coffeehouses, international students, Hookah Lounge

INTRODUCTION

After a long day at work or a lazy afternoon at home, many of us seek solace and distraction in a place where the magical combination of comfort, familiarity, and good company transform an ordinary hangout into our special "third place".

Hunter (2002) states, I'm not talking about winning and losing here, or races or sports or politics, but something far more important: the simple art of living your life in the real world. In that world, as someone has pointed out, all communities, and therefore all members of communities, need a "third place." It's not your home. It's not where you work. Those are the first two places. No, it's the place where you go to, um, be. (p.23)

The coffeehouse is a place where I people watch; where I'm inspired by those who visit the third place. It gives a glimpse of persons of every walk of life: young and old, rich and poor, small and large, quiet and loud, healthy and sick, school-aged and retired.

Oldenburg (1990) states that great civilizations, like great cities, share a common feature. Evolving within them and crucial to their growth and refinement are distinctive informal public gathering places. These become as much a part of the urban landscape as of the citizen's daily life and, invariably, they come to dominate the image of the city. Thus, its profusion of sidewalk cafes seems to be in Paris . . . The soul of London resides in her many pubs . . . Vienna's presence is seen and felt most within those eternal coffeehouses . . . the bier garten that is father to more formal German organizations, and the Japanese teahouse whose ceremonies are the model for an entire way of life.

This paper will examine the coffeehouse's role in creating and facilitating a third place for international students. It is an attempt to identify Hookah Coffeehouse

as a third place that become part of the Cleveland State University international students cultural landscape and to shed light on its role in fostering social life among them. Hookah as an illustrative case, this report presents and analyzes the social, spatial, and cultural aspects that create a third place for international students at Cleveland State University. The paper shows how these social aspects change private space to become public place. The conclusions point to the dynamic and the elastic nature of social places as expressed in specific cultural contexts of the international students who are studying and living in Cleveland.

Theoretical framework

"The Third Place" is a term used in the concept of community building to refer to social surroundings separate from the two usual social environments of home and the workplace. Oldenburg (1990) wrote *The great, good place*, perhaps the most influential work to date on why third places are important for civil society. Third places and public spaces are important features for democracy, civic engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of place (p.12)

Oldenburg (1990) explained that " all great societies provide informal meeting places, like the Forum in ancient Rome or a contemporary English pub. But since World War II, America has ceased doing so. The neighborhood tavern hasn't followed the middle class out to the suburbs" (p.14). Accordingly, for eight years, Oldenburg devoted himself to gathering the legend and lore of America's last remaining neighborhood taverns, ma-and-pa grocery stores and other examples of what he calls "third places." The term derives from Oldenburg's gloss on a Freudian concept. Sigmund Freud held that emotional well-being depends upon having someone to love and work to do. Oldenburg argues that the great psychoanalyst made his mental-health list one item too short. Besides a mate and a job, Oldenburg said, we need a dependable place of refuge where, for a few minutes a day, we can escape the demands of family and bosses. In that kind of psychological Eden, an easy-going conviviality allows us to be temporarily amnesic to our woes and shortcomings. Oldenburg is convinced that many problems of contemporary society-alienation in the workplace and soaring divorce rates trace to America's declining supply of such third places (p.15).

There's no place like third place

As I noted before, the term third place was invented by sociologist Ray Oldenburg and first appeared in his 1990 book *The great good place*, a celebration of the places where people can regularly go to relax and commune with friends, neighbors, and just whoever shows up. The

subtitle says it all: "Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You through the Day." The concept struck a chord and the book became surprisingly popular. Many businesses and organizations redesigned themselves to encourage people to socialize. Some even incorporated "third place" in their names. We now have, for example, the Third Place Coffeehouse in Raleigh, North Carolina, and the Third Place Bookstore in Lake Forest, Washington. Oldenburg even released a second book earlier this year: *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories About the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities*.

Location and brief description

The Hookah Lounge and Coffeehouse is located next to the Historic Palace Theater, 1505 Euclid Ave, in the opposite site to Starbucks coffeehouse that is located on the corner of Theater Square at Cleveland, Ohio. The coffee house consists of a ground floor and mezzanine balcony. The coffee house has two doors, one opened on the main street (Euclid Ave) and the other has in internal access to the main lobby of four floor offices building. The functional diagram of the first floor contains the service and quick- pick bar, small tables for one or two persons, tobacco hookah services, newspapers stand, and T.V. screen. The second floor (Mezzanine) has tables with privacy. Being that Hookah is located downtown, it is very accessible to Cleveland State University, offices buildings, and other businesses.

Literature review

Examining the number of texts concerning the coffeehouses allows me to frame the structure and the boundaries of this study which will comment on how coffeehouses create a third place for international students in Cleveland. The analysis of the following texts will assist to figure out and utilize a comparison and triangulation tools of a new ideas regarding the research question. Also, it suggests new ways to conduct the analysis of the gathered data on our group project. The following materials will be used as a comparison and triangulation tools to measure our findings: *Alone Together: public and private dimension of a Tel-Aviv Café* (1991) written by Shapira, R. and David Navon; *Media and Discourse in the Twentieth-Century Coffeehouse Movement* (1990) written by Vartabedian, L. and Robert Vartabedian; *Surfing the Coffeehouse* (1996) written by Sommerville, C.; *The Late Class*, written by McGrath, Ben (2006); *Getting the blind right* written by Clements, Alison (2005); *Carrying the coffee to Seattle* by Economist (2005); and *Café Society written* by Hertsgaard, Mark (2004).

To quantify the content of the mentioned texts, I structured a method to find out what are the attributes beyond the texts. After the description of behavioral and values including the cultural aspect on social organization and social interaction within groups and society, I categorized my analysis into three groups that related to each other: people, places, and activities.

People

The five coffeehouses (individual or theme) have variety of target groups. San Francisco's coffee houses are the most places that are considered frequently by all kinds of people from different professions, ages, appearances, origins, and dressings. It seems like global cosom-places. In contrast Starbucks, Costa Café' and Borders Café' have refined or selected target groups, such as students and business people, who would like to pick up cup of coffee or to conduct a short informal business meetings or talks. Juan Valdez is regarded as the spokesperson for the world's coffee-drinking youth, farmers, and indigenous people.

Places

The importance of place category has been identified and addressed clearly in the previous mentioned literatures. San Francisco's coffee houses are considered predominantly the white parts of town and have known and become the "Penny universities". In San Francisco, Penny Universities mean that the place where people can gather and socialize. San Francisco's coffee houses are integrated organically into the rhythm of their neighborhoods. Moreover, *Café Society* text indicated that visitors who want to know about San Francisco culture and society; one will find the real San Francisco as the residence in coffee houses.

Valdez is similar to San Francisco in the social meaning of the place; in contrast, Starbucks, Costa Café' and Borders Café' are places for students, families and workers to relax. We can say that the main objective of these coffee houses is a commercial one and they are seeking to maximize their revenues by making their places more attractive destinations for people. Their marketing policy is to offer the means that make the customers spending more money by staying longer. They are facilitating high speed internet, corners for students, places for families, music, cake, book selling. However, all these incentives are devoted for commercial initiation and the main purpose of the place is a commercial one.

Activity

San Francisco's, Costa Café', and Borders Café' present

a cultural markers, social spot rooted in the community, and place for the creative people. They hold a tolerant life style, politically progressive people, and racially mixed places. People feel these places as part of them and saying that these places are third place for people.

While Starbucks and Borders Café' are a commercial places, they are places where people build relationships by hanging out and arranging to meet in the third hub.

In conclusion, the findings through the content analysis of the three texts indicate that coffee houses are dynamic and elastic social places as expressed in the specific culture context of each coffee house place. Texts clarify the social and cultural function of the coffee houses as a third place which plays an interactional and mediating role between work place function and house function.

Regarding the question of our group case study, we can conclude that the question set up in class led us on the right track and interview analysis in the four texts is leading us to answer the question that insists on the coffee houses' role of playing and defining it self as a third social and cultural place.

Using categorization and coding system to break down the content enabled me to clarify and to organize my ideas and items of the case study in methods that figured out the control variables that affected my outcomes; also this method enhanced my ability to exclude the dummy variables and items.

Methodological Framework

The study was conducted at "Hookah", a coffeehouse located next to the Historic Palace Theater, 1505 Euclid Ave, in the opposite site to Starbucks coffeehouse that located on the corner of Theater Square at Cleveland. The customers' population is fairly homogeneous in socio-cultural status. The customers include international students and a few numbers of American students who are generally living in the Viking Hall and Fenn Tower dormitories. Seventy five percent of the customers are between twenty and thirty five years old, but there are some in forty year's old-age group. More than ninety percentages of the customers are regulars. Observations and field notes were carried out on a participatory basis. The coffee shop owner did know about my study and frequently volunteered information, clarifying important issues. A few regular customers were also interviewed for information about the place. Because Qualitative researchers generally rely on face- to- face interviewing when conducting in depth interviews, in this study, face to face interviews were used to gather data from customers and visitors at coffeehouses. The purpose of the interviews was to understand how coffeehouses can create a third place for the international students in Cleveland. In this study, I made in-person contact with potential respondents and explained the purpose of this pilot study to them.

Preliminary questions were based on an interview guide that focused on asking participants about their experiences with visiting coffeehouses. The interviews were tape-recorded with the respondent's permission. A small tape recorder was placed clearly on the table between me (as interviewer) and the participants.

One of the participants, whom I asked to participate in this study, is a student whom I used to see frequently at Hookah coffeehouse during my observation visits last week; however, the second participant is a frequent customer that I met twice at Hookah coffeehouse. Being both of the participants are students and regular customers at Hookah, access to reach respondents with confidence to gain more valuable gathered data will increase my data quality. In the interviews questions, I am seeking both narrative and subjective data status.

The observations, field notes, interviews, and visual analysis were aimed to interpret general features of coffeehouse settings and the social gatherings there. However, an analysis of the observations and the interviews focusing on phenomena related to three types affecting the meaning of coffeehouse as a third place: cultural, social, and spatial. In analyzing each aspect, I will follow the relevant behavior patterns of the customers in the wider dimension of the space.

Social Aspect

A deeper look at behavioral patterns of café customers and owner revealed that the socio-cultural features of the interactions in the place were much more complex than might be deduced from the main purpose of the coffeehouse; such as economic benefit, people have no time to make their coffee at their houses, transit, or place to meet ones' friends. It appears that Hookah coffeehouse constitutes an entirely public space for international students. It gives its customers the possibility of being together. In this sense, Hookah resembles a "third place", in that it is located outside both home and work, without being identified with public places open to all the community such as public parks. On the interpersonal level, many students behave at the Hookah in the public domain as if were their own and the term 'our' is more frequent than 'mine'. The customers' behaviors show that they feel themselves part of the whole community of the customers present. For instance, while taking my fields notes, I noted students from the upper class trying to give indications to the others that they are equal in order to keep themselves in the same social group.

"Are you going to your home country after Ramadan or at Christmas?" Mohamed, an Egyptian student, asked the Saudi group. "..ha..ha.. You have money to purchase a multi-trip ticket across the year….. You are lucky students.." Mohamed added. "We are a poor country; the Government pays us for only one ticket for all the period

of study". "no..no..the Government pays for us twice; however, our families pay for us to visit them every semester.." Saleh replied.

In the absence of clear physical division among people sitting at the various tables in   the ground level of Hookah, there is a visible social interaction demonstrated by the dynamic behavior of the customers at any particular table toward those around the T.V. or any other table. For example, Students are chatting, discussing and debating about a young singer that is singing at the moment on the T.V. Satellite Arabic channel. They are discussing every thing from classes to their personal and family issues. Entertainment talk is the spice of their coffee. There are informal and social relationships; students come and shake hands and greet others. They move around without ordering anything and sometimes spend a good time and go.

In the study of social communication within a certain place that has a specific social identity; Hookah affords the opportunity to such communication. On one occasion, two students sat at an adjacent table located in the ground space, each leaning against the wall while gazing at the common space and watching the T.V. in the centre of the coffeehouse. One of them said something, still following and gazing at the T.V; the other responded and started to get his attention. Then they turned their chairs and changed their seats. After a while, three strangers came and became engaged in a lively conversation with them. This indication that Hookah facilitates the initiation of communication among customers suggests the feeling of community among them. In Hookah, a person notices that one can sit alone or meet a group of friends, isolate one self or try to make social contacts, engage in academic matters, concentrate on eating, or become wrapped up in watching T.V. During my frequent visits to Hookah, it was considered a place that strengthened the social relationship among its customers. For example, since I used to go to Hookah for the purpose of this assignment, indirectly I found my self a part of this place and one of its societal group. The relationships among the members, makes me to believe in what the owner said to me when I conducted my fields observations,

"We are family in the Diaspora and all the students who come and stop here know that we aren't a corporation ….We care about strengthening the social relationships by gathering people and giving them the opportunity to drink coffee and smoke hooka," Marwan Khalaf, Hookah owner.

Spatial Aspect

The behavior of customers at Hookah shows a clear tendency toward public space, especially at the lower level. The customers have no preference for a certain table. It appears that the chairs at the ground floor are movable, and tables defined by groups and individual as

"ours". The tendency to sit at a table close to other tables makes customers know that they are attributes to public space. In addition, the clear preference demonstrated for families or people seeking a quiet place leads them to choose the upper floor. Customers attribute different significance to the different spaces and tables around the coffeehouse; the upper space is perceived as intimate, another place to see people and play cards, and another space to watch T.V. Hookah seems like a public place where some people pass from Euclid Avenue to the building through the coffeehouse in which is located. Some people also say to one another something like: "let's move up stairs, it's homier there."

Despite the fact that Hookah coffeehouse is a private place, owned by a particular person, it is also a public place that disintegrates part of the physical spatial of Euclid.

"It is a place for them and not for me as owner, we have a place to make people socialize and feel close to each other. Some students come to relax to get refuge from the stress at schools and the loneliness of their accommodations….Feel free and behave as if the place is yours," says Marwan Khalaf, the owner of Hookah

The physical division of Hookah into a space within a space, each consisting of different kinds and sizes of tables and chairs, indicates the architect who planned the interior aimed to create a private sub-space. However, this design was implemented for the previous coffeehouse that occupied Hookah's space. Hookah itself is an autonomous social spatial unit located in a different general space on Euclid in Cleveland. It is a place that opens to the public with no clear limitations on the kind of customers who may enter. However, while the main glass façade with a number of signs and announcements on it, along with one big sheet glass window convey the outer public atmosphere into the space, the inner faces of the window and the café' front are lineate between the coffeehouse cultural environment. The space within Hookah can be used for socializing, reading, sitting, smoking, and drinking. These activities take place in groups or individually.

Cultural Aspect

The name "Hookah Lounge and Café'" itself holds a contradictory meaning. The first part, "Hookah", has a cultural meaning about what occurs inside. The second part, however, reflects the culture outside of the coffeehouse. Despite this superficial contradiction, Hookah, in terms of place and culture, facilitates the initiation of communication among international students and American customers by creating a feeling of communal socialization, connected with a new cultural experience within the customers' population. Thus, a wide range of patterns of communication among customers was observed including shaking hands, playing cards, and watching T.V. The family atmosphere was enhanced by expressions of friendship exchanged between the owner and his regular customers. The atmosphere at Hookah is informal and almost familial. For example, the owner himself sits at the bar table conversing with customers and the employees do not wear special uniforms. The owner and the customers want to retain the respectable appearance of Hookah, which they consider one of the main elements that attract people and students with calm personalities. Finally, smoking hookah, watching Arabic T.V. channels and serving soft traditional meals give Hookah coffeehouse a special cultural symbol.

CONCLUSION

Although the spatial aspect in Hookah coffeehouse is noted as public place with some degree of privacy, the special meaning of it reflects more obviously in the cultural context of Hookah. Hookah represents a third place for international students and it continues to be part of a certain culture and community. The analysis of the coffeehouse indicates a number of general empirical patterns which can clarify the case of Hookah coffeehouse as a "public place for socializing, spending leisure time, and having a home feeling". It is more correct to see the coffeehouse located in its role between private "house" and public "work". The place affords a certain cultural and social atmosphere that can attract a certain people who attempt to translate their activities as determined by human behavior.

Hookah reveals to its customers a place where informality, closeness, cooperativeness and sociability emerge. As such, it has the atmosphere of home, and for some people, the café serves as a "third place". The place becomes a popular leisure and social place for a number of the international students.

The methods used in the project are considered a good tool in gathering a purposive data. Observations, frequent visits, visual analysis and field notes assisted us in flexible and dynamic brainstorming on suitable questions that we could ask concerning the assigned problems. Content analysis of a number of cases utilized a concrete basis to understand the phenomenon of coffeehouses as a third place from an academic point of view, and to some extent, the texts' content serves as a literature review that helped me to triangulate an invisible comparison between their content and the gathered purposive data on Hookah Coffeehouse.

The process of data gathering helped us in reformulating our research question many times; I think the research question on Hookah coffeehouse could be better phrased "How do Coffeehouses create a third place for part of Cleveland State University: Hookah Lounge and Coffeehouse as case study." My findings presented that students with different nationalities

including American students visit this place. The main reason for those students to visit is seeking for a third place with cultural and social context.

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