CHAPTER 15

Beyond The Walls: Reading Theater Buildings in Late Ottoman Beyoğlu (Pera) Through the Image of the City

Bahar Küçük Karakaş
Assist. Prof. Dr., Karadeniz Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Trabzon/Turkiye. E-mail: baharkucuk@ktu.edu.tr
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3894-5160

Elif Arslan
Res. Assist. Karadeniz Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Trabzon/Turkiye. E-mail: elif.arslan@ktu.edu.tr
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0389-5324

ABSTRACT

This study details the evolution of traditional Ottoman theater buildings, interrogating their social traces before examining the positioning of Beyoğlu (Pera) theater buildings through the image of the city. Addressing the core problem, "How did theater buildings construct social behavior and the urban image in the Late Ottoman Period?", the research bridges a gap that predominantly treats these venues via art history or building inventory perspectives. To trace this spatial-behavioral evolution within the city of image, a spatial analysis of Beyoğlu theater buildings is conducted using Huber (1887–1891) and Goad (1904–1906) maps. Utilizing primary and secondary sources as visual and written archives, books, journals and the Ottoman Archives, the study demonstrates that theater buildings functioned not merely as architectural entities, but as urban components shaping socio-cultural dynamics and circulation, defining nodes, edges and districts and transforming into monumental landmarks.

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1. Introduction

The Tanzimat era, gaining momentum with the 1839 Edict of Gülhane, initiated sweeping transformations across Ottoman state and social life, naturally extending into architecture and spatial organization. Shifts in social structure, etiquette, and lifestyle originated among minority populations and higher state echelons before trickling down to the broader public. Throughout this process, public architecture acquired paramount significance as the inward-oriented nature of classical Ottoman architecture gave way to an outward-looking, monumental, and Europeanized spatial language (Karabulut, 2016). Western forms gradually integrated into the urban texture alongside new imperial palaces that symbolized the power of the Sultan and the state. These modernization efforts, deeply reflected in daily life, inevitably reshaped public spectacles and entertainment practices.

Prior to the Tanzimat period, Ottoman spectacle culture,encompassing performances such as Karagöz (shadow theater), meddah (storytellers), orta oyunu (traditional theater), çengi, and köçek (traditional dancers), flourished largely within open and adaptable settings. These traditional performances required no permanent or purpose built indoor structures; instead, public squares and recreational grounds (mesire) served as primary performance arenas. Within this spatial layout, audience engagement was remarkably fluid, interactive, and mobile. Spectators freely consumed food and drink, smoked tobacco, conversed loudly, and directly engaged with performers, effectively becoming organic participants in the event itself (Gürbüz et al., 2019). As modernization accelerated, traditional spectacle venues shifted form, giving rise to "intermediary" or "transitional" spaces. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, traditional coffeehouses evolved into reading rooms (kıraathane) with libraries, eventually transforming into new typologies such as the café chantant and the gazino. These spaces featured structured table and chair seating while hosting orchestral performances, comedic acts, and acrobatics. Emerging from the traditional coffeehouse typology, these venues successfully adapted Western entertainment elements into local culture. Concurrently, the urban positioning of theater buildings drifted from the traditional hubs of Direklerarası and Şehzadebaşı toward the Beyoğlu (Pera) district, which housed a dense Western and Levantine population (Gürbüz et al., 2019).

As Aykaç (2022) notes, the most radical and monumental spatial manifestations of Westernization within spectacle culture were undoubtedly theater and opera houses. Beginning in the 1840s, modern enclosed theaters,

such as the Naum Theater, the French Theater, the Concordia, the Odeon in Beyoğlu, and the Ottoman Theater in Gedikpaşa, were raised across Istanbul. Staging major works simultaneously with European auditoriums, these venues introduced Western splendor through horseshoe-shaped parterres, tiered seating, private boxes, ornate plasterwork, and massive crystal chandeliers. This cultural transformation reached its peak as state sponsored theaters were incorporated directly into imperial palaces. The Dolmabahçe Palace Theater, commissioned by Sultan Abdülmecid and the Yıldız Palace Theater, built under Sultan Abdülhamid II, served as key venues for diplomacy and royal representation. These grand new structures replaced the open, circular, and egalitarian layout of the traditional palanga with an axial, class conscious, and wall enclosed "auditorium" configuration.

The transition from open air, interactive participation to the rigid constraints of an enclosed theater proved particularly turbulent for the traditional audience. Modern auditoriums naturally relegated spectators to a passive role, seeking to discipline their behavior. In the early stages, however, local audiences routinely disrupted decorum by talking loudly during performances, tossing fruit or snacks onto the stage, eating shelled nuts and carrying umbrellas or walking sticks into the hall. These habits triggered ongoing conflicts with theater management, frequently necessitating police intervention and drawing sharp criticism in the press (And, 1999).

Over time, following the declaration of the Republic and the institutionalization of modernization as state policy, theaters and emerging cinema halls were recoded from simple "entertainment venues" into spaces of culture and education critical to nation-building. Through the People's Houses (Halkevleri), theater and cinema expanded beyond major urban centers into Anatolia. Driven by figures like Muhsin Ertuğrul, audience discipline was fully established, enabling women to attend performances freely alongside men rather than being secluded behind wooden lattices (Kenanlı, 2009). Ultimately, the shift from open public squares to enclosed auditoriums was more than a physical or architectural evolution; it served as a powerful instrument of social transformation, utilizing spatial design to discipline, monitor, and mold the audience into modern compliant citizens (Aykaç, 2022).

Within the Beyoğlu (Pera) district, spectacle venues contributed to broader sociological shifts while simultaneously driving urban transformation through their physical evolution, spatial connectivity, and heightened visibility. Firstly, the study investigates the evolution of traditional spectacle culture during the Late Ottoman period, tracing the theater buildings' trajectory from open

grounds to enclosed, disciplinary, and hierarchical architectural forms, while analyzing its spatial logic and social ramifications. Subsequently, it utilizes Kevin Lynch's urban image framework to read how these venues positioned themselves within the urban texture of Beyoğlu (Pera) and shaped its surrounding social axis.

Addressing the core research question, "How did theater buildings shape social behavior and the urban image during the Late Ottoman Period?", this study fills a gap in the literature, which has predominantly examined spectacle venues through narrow art historical or building inventory lenses. The historical and sociological backdrop of this work examines the public ramifications of transitioning from an active, open air audience to a passive, regulated crowd within enclosed halls. While the broader literature review considers performance structures across Beyoğlu (Pera) and the Historic Peninsula from the pre Tanzimat era through the early twentieth century, the core empirical analysis focuses specifically on private spectacle venues in Beyoğlu (Pera). Utilizing urban spatial analysis, the research draws from primary and secondary materials, including visual and written archives, books, periodicals, period newspapers, and the Ottoman Archives. Ultimately, this study aims to decipher the evolution of theater buildings in the Late Ottoman era, evaluating their influence on daily social practices and the broader urban image.

1.1. Traditional Ottoman Spectacle Culture

Ottoman performance and spectacle culture represents a comprehensive performative tradition rooted in Central Asian shamanic rituals, synthesized with Anatolia's rich cultural heritage and elements of Islamic civilization (And, 1985). In academic literature, this tradition is generally examined through two main branches: village theater and folk theater. While village performance arts relied on agricultural rituals and fertility beliefs, folk theater, emerging alongside urbanization, stripped itself of these religious and magical functions, evolving into professional entertainment forms requiring specific mastery, such as Karagöz (shadow theater), Meddah (storytelling) and Ortaoyunu (traditional open air theater) (Düzgün, 2000).

When examining the aesthetic and formal characteristics of this culture, it stands directly opposite the Aristotelian, enclosed, and illusionistic structure that forms the foundation of Western theater. Traditional Ottoman spectacle culture relies on improvisation rather than a written script, and an aesthetic based on abstraction and representation rather than illusion. The fact that the performance on stage is a fictional play is not concealed from the audience;

thus, no imaginary wall is drawn between the actor and the spectator. Rather than being a passive consumer, the spectator assumes the role of an organic and active participant who shares the same time and space with the actor, intervening in the play and altering its flow when necessary (Dönmez, 2023).

The spatial practice of traditional spectacle culture was shaped in accordance with this open and flexible aesthetic structure. Requiring no enclosed and fixed architectural structures like the Italian proscenium arch stage, these performances possessed the potential to instantly transform any locus of daily life, such as palaces, inns, public squares, tents, and coffeehouses, into a stage (Ümit, 2014). For instance, theater coffeehouses served as the most prominent public spectacle venues where class distinctions dissolved and the public gathered to engage in Meddah and Karagöz performances. On the other hand, Ottoman festivals (sûr-ı hümâyuns), which lasted for weeks on the occasion of dynastic weddings or military victories to showcase the splendor of the state, formed the most magnificent spectacle platforms of the era with tents, giant puppets, and parades set up in vast areas like At Meydanı (And, 1985). In short, the imperial court, trade guilds, military corps, and Sufi circles functioned as the primary spheres that both produced and demanded this flexible performance culture (Düzgün, 2000).

Evaluated in a social context, the stage constructed by Ottoman spectacle culture mirrored the cosmopolitan, multilingual, and multicultural texture of the empire. Typologies depicted on the Ortaoyunu stage (palanga) or the Karagöz screen, such as the Albanian, the Jew, the Persian, the Armenian, the Çelebi (gentleman), or the Tiryaki (opium addict), coexisted through their distinct identities and dialects without a strict hegemonic hierarchy among them. These plays refused to serve as a didactic bridge imposing a specific ideology or absolute moral truth upon society. Characters were not idealized; on the contrary, the shortcomings of every ethnic and social group were equally subjected to humor, filtered through a sharp lens of social critique (Arıcı, 2015).

Ottoman traditional spectacle culture was built upon an improvisational, flexible, interactive structure that welcomed public participation and possessed no spatial or social boundaries. However, this polyphonic and organic structure underwent a major rupture with the Westernization process initiated during the Tanzimat period. This paradigm shift necessitated the evolution of spectacle venues, gradually replacing the liberating stages of streets, public squares, and coffeehouses with enclosed Western theater buildings framed by physical walls.

1.2. Transition from Traditional to Modern: Coffeehouses, Gazinos, and Café Chantants

The Westernization process, which gained momentum in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century and became a systematic state policy with the Edict of Tanzimat, served as a fundamental turning point in the transformation of social life and the urban spaces where this life was staged (Ercan, 2018). During this period, social change manifested in the city's silhouette and physical spaces before it reshaped individual practices (Polater et al., 2023). Social life in the traditional Ottoman city, originally inward oriented and organized around the neighborhood and mosque, gradually reoriented toward Western models, yielding to new public spaces focused on outward visibility, consumption, and spectacle. The places where this spatial and cultural evolution was most distinctly experienced in daily life were coffeehouses, gazinos, and café chantants (Ercan, 2018). During the classical era, coffeehouses served as primary gathering sites where men predominantly socialized, neighborhood culture was sustained, and traditional spectacle plays like Karagöz and Meddah were performed (Gürbüz et al., 2019). However, with the onset of modernization, these venues began to change both formally and functionally. The replacement of traditional wooden benches (peyke) and built in divans (sedir) with European style tables and chairs, alongside the availability of newspapers imported from Europe, brought coffeehouses closer to the appearance of modern European cafes (Polater et al., 2023). Over time, certain coffeehouses ceased to be mere venues for conversation or beverage consumption, transforming into multifunctional spaces that hosted Western theater troupes, comedic acts, and orchestral music performances (Gürbüz et al., 2019).

This functional enrichment within coffeehouses and the permanent integration of music into these venues paved the way for the concepts of the gazino and the café chantant to enter Ottoman entertainment life (Şenyurt, 2021). These new venues, which could be characterized as Westernized (alafranga) versions of traditional taverns and coffeehouses, distinguished themselves sharply from traditional institutions through the consumption of alcohol, Western-style music and the presence of female performers. With the emergence of women as both employees and clients, marked a radical rupture in Ottoman entertainment culture (Erdinçli et al., 2023).

This physical and functional spatial transformation brought about an identity crisis and cultural duality within Ottoman society (Polater et al., 2023). Shifts in the perception of entertainment were interpreted and

experienced differently across social strata. Concentrated primarily along the Beyoğlu and Galata axis, these new alafranga venues became platforms of self actualization for a new archetype, termed "chic" (şık) in the parlance of the era, who emulated Western lifestyles. Even when failing to fully comprehend the Western origin plays or music performed, this social stratum viewed attending these venues as a marker of status and modernization required by the social circles they sought to join (Erdinçli et al., 2023). This dynamic clearly demonstrates that the spectacle venue shifted from a mere physical structure to an instrument of identity construction and new modes of belonging (Polater et al., 2023).

Conversely, the public's adaptation to these new theater buildings did not proceed smoothly, evoking resistance from traditional segments of society. Sections firmly attached to traditional values perceived the unrestricted alcohol consumption and mixed-gender socialization at gazinos and café chantants as moral corruption. They actively opposed the opening of such venues, particularly in Muslim neighborhoods, by submitting formal petitions to the administration (Şenyurt, 2021). Consequently, cultural divergence became spatialized in Istanbul's urban practice; traditional spectacles attempted to survive within a contracting area in the Historic Peninsula (Suriçi), whereas modern spectacles and entertainment concentrated in Beyoğlu, effectively dividing the city culturally (Gürbüz et al., 2019). To manage this cultural friction and public order concerns, the state administration subjected gazinos to strict regulatory oversight, intervening in everything from operating hours to the content of staged theater scripts in an effort to keep these new public spaces within moderate boundaries and safeguard public morality (Şenyurt, 2021).

1.3. Construction of Walls: Theater buildings in the Late Ottoman

Modernization and westernization movements accelerating in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century brought profound changes to cultural and entertainment architecture, as they did across all spheres of social life. Performances traditionally held in coffeehouses, taverns, or open air public squares began to yield to permanent, Western designed theater buildings equipped with stage, auditorium (parterre), and private box (loca) layouts. These modern spectacle venues built in the Ottoman capital functioned both as products of an elite artistic sensibility developed under imperial patronage and as multifunctional cultural centers that reshaped the urban texture through investments by Pera based private entrepreneurs, catering to the city's cosmopolitan population (Özcan Coşkunsoy, 2019).

In the construction process of spectacle venues, the Ottoman court personally assumed a pioneering role by incorporating Western civil architectural forms within its own precincts (Öner, 1995). The most magnificent early example of this architectural trend was the Dolmabahçe Palace Theater, commissioned by Sultan Abdülmecid immediately adjacent to the palace complex (Umur, 1987). Designed by architects Dieterle and Hammond with interior decoration executed by the French designer Séchan, the building was constructed as a replica of the Versailles Palace Opera (Yılmaz, 2007). Featuring a three hundred person capacity, Corinthian capital columns separating the private boxes, massive crystal chandeliers, and screened boxes (kafesli loca) specifically designed for harem women, this building entered history as the first monumental enclosed spectacle venue in the Ottoman Empire (Göncü, 2011).

Following Dolmabahçe, the second permanent theater structure constructed within royal grounds was the Yıldız Palace Theater, commissioned by Sultan Abdülhamid II adjacent to the Harem apartments (Batur, 1994, as cited in Taşer, 2024). Built by the master builder Yanko with design contributions from the Italian architect D'Aronco, this theater had a capacity of one hundred fifty spectators (Kenanlı, 2009). With its gold starred blue dome, wooden columns supporting the boxes, and central royal box reserved for the Sultan, this venue preserved the court's inward oriented entertainment culture within an enclosed and protected architectural setting (Yılmaz, 2007).

This architectural transformation spearheaded by the court resonated far more rapidly and diversely in the civic realm, particularly within the cosmopolitan Beyoğlu (Pera) district (Kenanlı, 2009). Prominent among these civic initiatives in Beyoğlu was the Naum Theater, operated by Mihail Naum and rebuilt in masonry with financial support from the Sultan (Özcan Coşkunsoy, 2019). Featuring a horseshoe shaped parterre, private boxes lined with lustrous textures, and grand stage machinery, this venue served as the primary center introducing the Istanbul public to European operas under the discipline of an enclosed auditorium (Umur, 1987).

Over time, similar spectacle venues emerged across different quarters of the city. Originally designed as a wooden circus arena, the Gedikpaşa Theater was converted into the Ottoman Theater under the direction of Güllü Agop following necessary renovations, becoming a dedicated venue for Turkish-language plays (Kenanlı, 2009). During the same period, located at a prominent node in Pera, the Concordia Theater made a lasting mark on urban entertainment life as a multifunctional structure hosting a range of events, from

light comedies and operettas to early cinema screenings, utilizing its enclosed winter auditorium facing the street and an open air summer garden at the rear (Evren, 2014). Praise for its excellent acoustics and horseshoe shaped box architecture made the Tepebaşı Winter Theater a long standing epicenter for local theater institutions (Kenanlı, 2009).

The construction of these physical walls brought not merely a spatial shift, but also the drawing of a social and psychological boundary between the audience and the space. The local audience, accustomed to moving freely, consuming food and drink, and interacting during open air performances, experienced significant friction with the rigid discipline of these enclosed buildings structured around seating arrangements, private boxes, and foyers. Non compliance with indoor etiquette and disruptions during performances ultimately forced theater managers and state authorities to issue strict regulatory codes (nizamname) (Aykaç, 2022).

Ultimately, from the Tanzimat period through the transition to the Republic, the walls erected around spectacle venues precipitated issues of identity and adaptation within Ottoman social life, thoroughly altering cultural consumption habits. By confining entertainment within defined architectural boundaries, aesthetic norms, and auditorium etiquette, these theater buildings secured their place in history as permanent, tangible monuments of the empire's Westernization vision etched into the urban texture.

1.3.1. Royal Theaters

The Ottoman sultans' close monitoring of cultural developments in Europe and their personal interest in the performing arts led to the integration of modern theater architecture directly into the palace complexes. These structures were designed as prestigious venues for diplomatic and artistic receptions where the sultan and the court officials entertained representatives of foreign states.

1.3.1.1. Dolmabahçe Palace Theater

As a result of Sultan Abdülmecid's keen interest in Western music and opera, this building, planned to coincide with the construction of Dolmabahçe Palace, began operations in 1858–1859 across from the Valide Mosque Clock Tower (near today's İnönü Stadium). Near the stage on the theater's ornate, embellished ceiling is the date 1274. This number indicates the Hijri year and the year construction began, corresponding to 1858 in the Gregorian calendar. The first news report announcing the theater's opening appeared in

issue No. 918 of Ceride-i Havadis, dated 6 Jumada al-Awwal 1275 (January 11, 1859) (Sevengil, 1969). Designed by Dieterle and Hammond, with interior decoration by the French decorator Séchan, known for his work at the Paris Opera, the building is a highly magnificent structure modeled after the Opera House at the Palace of Versailles (Umur, 1987). Inside the rectangular, gabled roofed building were Corinthian columned partitions separating the boxes, massive crystal chandeliers, red velvet upholstery, and gilded decorations (Yılmaz, 2007). With a capacity of approximately three hundred people, this theater featured separate boxes and entrances designed specifically (with latticed screens) for the sultan, princes, ambassadors, and women of the harem (Kenanlı, 2009). This magnificent building, which hosted both foreign theater companies and Turkish plays as well as diplomatic banquets, lost its original function following a fire in 1863 and was used for many years as the "Istabl-ı Amire" (Palace Stables) and a tobacco warehouse; it was completely demolished during road construction work in 1937 (Yılmaz, 2007).



Figure 1 The photos of the Dolmabahce Palace Theater (Directorate General of National Palaces, Grand National Assembly of Turkey. (n.d.).

1.3.1.2. Yıldız Palace Theater

Built after the Dolmabahçe Palace Theater and the only Ottoman palace theater to have survived to the present day, this structure was commissioned by Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1889 within the Yıldız Palace complex on the occasion of a visit by German Emperor Wilhelm II (Yılmaz, 2007). Located adjacent to the palace's harem quarters (Valide Sultan Pavilion) and built by Yanko, the son of Kalfa Vasilaki, who was also influenced by the ideas of the Italian architect D'Aronco, the building appears quite simple from the outside but features an elaborate decorative program on the interior (Kenanlı, 2009).

Much smaller and more intimate than the Dolmabahçe Theater, this hall has a capacity of 150 people. The rectangular hall is surrounded on three sides by boxes (enclosed by gilded grilles for the women of the harem) supported by twelve wooden columns and the royal box is situated directly opposite the stage. This elegant space, whose ceiling is adorned with gold stars against a blue background, has hosted not only Italian operas but also works in Turkish by local artists and writers such as Ahmet Mithat Efendi; following renovations after the Republican era, it continues to exist today as a museum (Yılmaz, 2007).

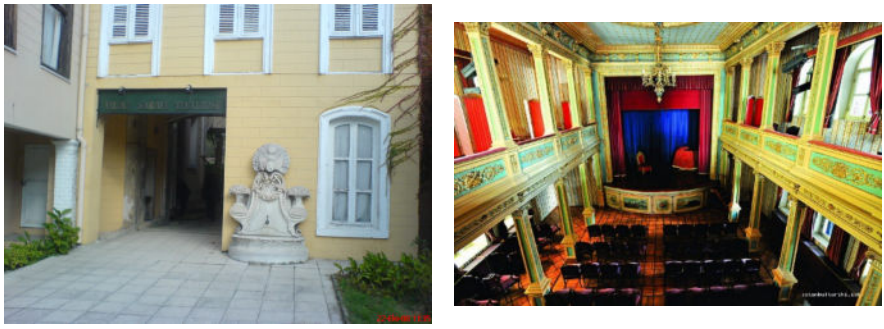


Figure 2 The Entrance of the Theater (a) (Kenanlı, 2009); The Interior of the Theater (b) (İstanbul Tarihi, n.d.).

1.3.2. Civil Theaters

With the onset of the Tanzimat Era, the Pera (Beyoğlu) and Suriçi districts, in particular, became home to numerous Western style theater buildings established by civil entrepreneurs. These venues served as new entertainment hubs that brought together the city's diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

1.3.2.1. Naum Theater

The Naum Theater, a milestone in Istanbul's introduction to theater and opera in the Western sense, was built on Istiklal Avenue, in the area where Çiçek Passage stands today, after being taken over by Mihail Naum in 1844. Originally a wooden structure, the building was reduced to ashes in a fire in 1846. It was subsequently rebuilt on a larger scale using stone and brick by the British architect W. J. Smith, with a personal financial contribution of 60,000 kuruş from Sultan Abdülmecid. With its gold leaf decorations on a white background, its massive British made crystal chandelier, and the special royal box reserved for the sultan, it rivaled the European theaters of the

era (Özcan Coşkunsoy, 2019). During this period, Naum requested and was granted a ten year government concession granting him the exclusive right to stage plays in Istanbul at the Naum Theater. Over the course of these ten years, the Naum became one of the unrivaled theaters of its time (Sevengil, 1969). This prestigious venue, where major European operas were staged almost simultaneously with performances in Paris or London, shaped the city's musical and cultural life; however, it was completely destroyed in the great Beyoğlu fire of 1870.



Figure 3 The Entrance and Interior of the Theater (a),(b) (Tarihi Çiçek Pasajı, 2025).

1.3.2.2. Odeon (Variety) Theater

Located near the Halep Bazaar in Beyoğlu, the Odeon Theater (formerly known as the Varyete Theater) was an entertainment venue known for its light comedies and pantomime performances. Its greatest significance in the history of Istanbul theater lies in the fact that, in addition to stage plays, it was one of the pioneering venues to host the city's first "cinematograph" screenings. Beginning on January 24, 1897, the Odeon Theater brought moving images to audiences using early cinematic devices of the era, such as the "Cinevitagraphe Parisien" and later the "Royal Biograph," serving as a key center of adaptation as Ottoman audiences transitioned from traditional performing arts to modern visual technologies (Evren, 2024).

1.3.2.3. Tepebaşı Drama (Petit Champs) Theater

In 1874, preparations began to build a theater, and the construction was entrusted to architect Barborini. Black Bey, who oversaw municipal affairs in Beyoğlu, secured financial support from the wealthy residents of the area and had the theater completed in 1881. Since foreigners referred to this area



Figure 4 The location of the Theater in Beyoğlu (Pera) (a) (Dağdelen, 2007); The entrance of the Theater (b) (İstiklal.ist, n.d.).

as "Petit Champs" the theater there was also known as the Petit Champs Theater (And, 1983). The Tepebaşı Winter Theater (Drama Theater), with its architectural features and excellent acoustics, was one of the most distinguished performance venues in the Ottoman capital. With its horseshoe shaped layout, the VIP box at its center, Baroque decorations predominantly featuring wood, and red velvet curtains, it brought the elegance of European theaters to Istanbul. It garnered praise for its large capacity of 1,000 seats and its sound system, which allowed even the faintest whisper to be heard from every corner of the stage. Initially hosting renowned foreign theater companies, the building served as one of the main stages for Darülbedayi starting in 1916 and for the Istanbul Municipal Theaters during the Republican era; however, it was destroyed as a result of two consecutive fires in 1970 and 1971 (Kenanlı, 2009).

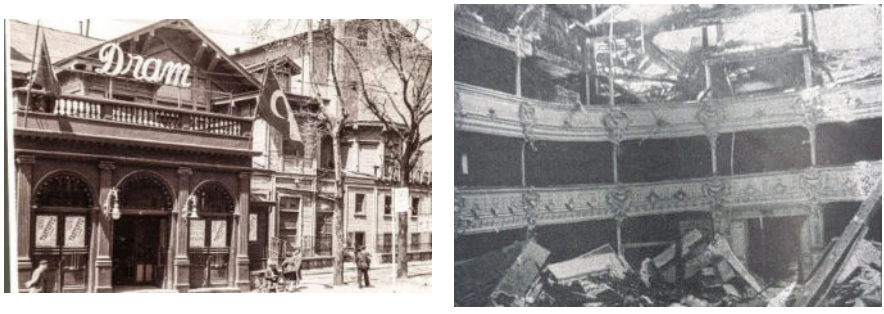


Figure 5 The entrance of the Theater (a) (İstisan Kolektif, 2025);The interior of the Theater (b) (And, 1973)

1.3.2.4. Concordia Theater

Located on Istiklal Avenue, on the site of today's Saint Antoine Church, the Concordia Theater was converted into a theater in 1871 by architects Ricci

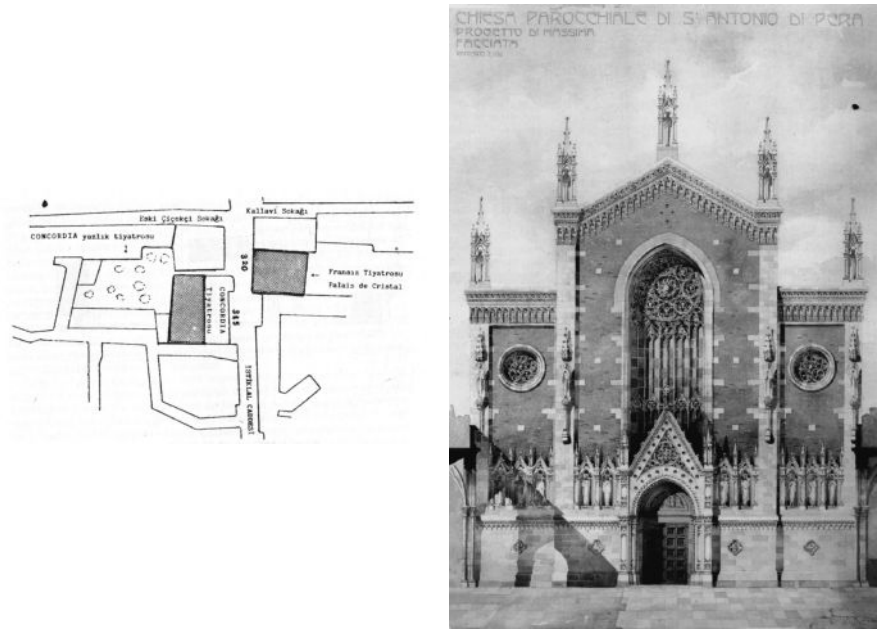


Figure 6 The location of the Theater in Beyoğlu (Pera) (a) (Evren, 2024); The entrance of the Theater (b) (Evren, 2024).

and Parmeggianni and starting in 1886, was operated by Andreas Ksenatos and Andreas Lividas as a famous "café concert" venue. The venue consisted of an enclosed winter hall facing the street and a summer garden located at the rear. This theater, which hosted operettas and variety shows, attracted a bohemian and diverse clientele, ranging from the sons of pashas to firemen, and was occasionally the scene of police raids (Evren, 2024). Starting in 1899, the theater began regular film screenings using the "Royal Biograph" projector and these screenings were moved outdoors during the summer months, establishing one of the city's earliest "open air cinema" practices. The building, which served for many years, was demolished in 1906, and a church was built on the site (Kenanlı, 2009).

1.3.2.5. French (Crystal) Theater

On the Beyoğlu entertainment map, the French Theater (Palais de Cristal), located directly across from the Concordia Theater, in the area where the Elhamra Han stands today, operated as one of the most famous performance venues of its time (Evren, 2024). After being reduced to ashes in the great fire of 1831, the building was rebuilt by the Italian architect Giustiniani and became a refined hub of attraction for the city's high society elite and Levantines,

hosting classical French plays, lavish balls, and concerts (Kenanlı, 2009). With the "café chantant" entertainment it offered its audience, which met European standards, it became one of the key venues reflecting the city's vision of cultural Westernization. The theater closed in 1870 due to the Franco Prussian War (Sevengil, 1969).



Figure 7 The location of the Theater in Beyoğlu (Pera) (a) (Dağdelen, 2007); The facade of the Theater (b) (Kültür Envanteri, n.d.).

1.3.2.6. Pera Circus

Built in 1885 by architect Campanaki as a wooden structure on the vacant lot behind the Halep Passage on Istiklal Avenue (Cirque de Pera), the building, as its name suggests, was originally designed for circuses, horse shows, and acrobatic performances. However, in response to the high demand for opera and theater performances in the Pera district, the building's ceiling was raised in 1889 and large windows were added, transforming the space from a circus venue into one suitable for operettas and theater productions. This rapid architectural intervention is a concrete example of how performance venues in the Ottoman Empire were adapted in a flexible and practical manner to meet the cultural consumption needs of the time. The building served in this capacity until it was destroyed by fire in 1904 (Kenanlı, 2009).

1.3.2.7. Gedikpaşa Theater

Built in the Suriçi district of Istanbul, near Kumkapı, the Gedikpaşa Theater is a landmark venue in the institutional development of Turkish theater history (Özcan Coşkunsoy, 2019). The Gedikpaşa Theater was the first permanent and regularly operating theater venue in Ottoman society where plays in Turkish were staged (Sevengil, 1968). Originally built by a Frenchman named Soullier as a circus using wooden materials and in the shape of a horseshoe, the structure was leased by Güllü Agop in 1867–1868 and renamed the "Ottoman Theater." As the first theater where Muslim actors took the stage and where original and



Figure 8 The location of the Theater in Beyoğlu (Pera) (Dağdelen, 2007).

adapted Turkish plays were regularly presented to the local audience, it played a pioneering role in helping the traditional audience become accustomed to theater etiquette. This historic building, which also featured a private box reserved for the sultan across from the stage, was completely demolished overnight in 1884 by order of the palace because the politically charged play 'Çerkez Özdenleri' would incite ethnic minorities (Özcan Coşkunsoy, 2019).

1.3.2.8. Ses 1885 Theater

Built on the site of the Pera Circus, which was founded in 1885, the venue was rebuilt in its current form as a fully equipped theater by architect Campanaki following the fire of 1904. With a total audience capacity of 500, seventeen boxes, and a truly magnificent interior design, this venue has adapted to the city's changing dynamics over time, serving under various names and functions, including Eldorado, the Variety Theater, the French Theater, the Darülbedayi Operetta Stage, and Ses Cinema. Restored by Ferhan Şensoy in 1980 and reopening its curtains under the name Ortaoyuncular, this building is one of our extremely rare and valuable examples of civil architectural heritage that has managed to survive from the Ottoman period to the present day without being demolished or losing its original function (Kenanlı, 2009).



Figure 9 The entrance of the Theater (a) (Kenanlı,2009); The Interior of the Theater (b) (Microfon Blog, 2018).

1.4. Identity and Culture: in the Context of Changing Practices in Theater Buildings in Late Ottoman

The westernization movements that gained momentum in the Ottoman Empire beginning in the 19th century forced traditional entertainment and public culture to undergo changes that were as much sociological as they were spatial. From the Tulip Era to the Tanzimat, traditional performances held in coffeehouses, taverns, and open air recreational areas featured an extremely flexible, interactive structure where the audience could eat and drink during the performance, move about freely and engage in direct verbal communication with the performers (Gürbüz & Kula Say, 2019). However, following the Tanzimat Edict, the construction of modern theater buildings, closed in the Western sense and featuring a stage and box seating arrangement, brought about a challenging adaptation process for the local and, in particular, Muslim population, who were accustomed to the freedom of open air spaces; it was, in a sense, a "test of the theater building" (Aykaç, 2022).

Western style theater buildings, with their rules and physical boundaries, created a major clash with the habits of the local audience. Audience members, who continued to view the theater as a place of ordinary, unregulated entertainment rather than an artistic cultural activity, struggled for a long time to conform to the discipline of the enclosed auditorium (Aykaç, 2022). The fact that audience members chatted loudly among themselves during performances, burst into laughter even during the most tragic and sorrowful scenes, poured water from the upper levels of the auditorium, or threw shelled nuts and matchsticks around was harshly criticized in the press of the time (And, 1999). In fact, as a habit stemming from the traditional improvised comedy culture,

it had become commonplace for audience members to throw nuts, pistachios, roasted chickpeas, coins, and even oranges onto the stage to express their approval or disapproval of the actors; for example, during a performance at the Gedikpaşa Theater, an orange thrown onto the stage struck a female actor in the eye, resulting in injury. In the face of this unruly behavior and public order incidents that sometimes caused performances to be cut short, the government and theater administrations were forced to impose serious penalties. Through special regulations prepared by the High Council of Judicial Decrees, it was strictly prohibited for audience members to enter theater halls with canes, sticks, umbrellas, or sharp objects; to whistle during the performance; to shout loudly; to smoke; and to bring small children into the hall without supervision; and it was announced that those who failed to comply with the rules would be ejected by law enforcement (And, 1972).

The compliance issue did not stem solely from audience members violating the rules; there were also justified public complaints directed at theater operators. Inadequate ventilation in enclosed auditoriums, heavy cigarette smoke inside, dusty seats, and even the presence of rodents such as mice or insects roaming the auditoriums were among the physical shortcomings most frequently complained about by the audience. Furthermore, theater operators, in an effort to avoid losses when venues were not sufficiently filled, would fabricate excuses such as "the lead actor suddenly fell ill" to cancel previously announced performances at the last minute or arbitrarily shorten the performances, which created a deep sense of distrust among the audience and paved the way for loud protests in the theaters (Aykaç, 2022).

One of the most contentious issues regarding the integration of enclosed theater buildings into Ottoman urban culture was the presence of women in these spaces. Due to the widespread belief among conservative circles that the theater would corrupt women's morals, women were kept away from theater halls for a long time; theater operators seeking to overcome this problem were forced to construct private boxes in the halls, enclosed by thick curtains and gilded grilles, reserved exclusively for women (Aykaç, 2022). Attempts by women to take their place as public art spectators in the same environment as men were met with harsh social backlash (Yılmaz, 2007).

This "trial" that the local population, particularly Muslim audiences, faced with regard to theater buildings continued to a large extent until the proclamation of the Republic, despite the enlightenment efforts of the Constitutional Monarchy period. However, during the Republican era, this challenge was overcome with Muhsin Ertuğrul's assumption of leadership at the

Istanbul Municipal Theaters and the strict disciplinary rules he enforced (such as prohibiting entry into the auditorium once the play had begun and banning the consumption of food inside), as well as Turkish women's growing freedom to take their places both on stage and in the audience (Aykaç, 2022). During this process, theater buildings evolved in the public's eyes from being merely a "place for entertainment and passing the time" to attaining the status of a "space for cultural enrichment" through their rules, etiquette, and architecture, becoming one of the most important social showcases of modernization (Kenanlı, 2009).

The construction of theater buildings and their concentrated location in Beyoğlu have significantly influenced both the urban structure and social behavior patterns. On a spatial level, these structures have established themselves as strong landmarks in the urban image and have shaped pedestrian traffic along the street. Çiçek Pasajı (Cité de Pera), built to replace the Naum Theater after it was destroyed in the 1870 fire, serves as evidence of how the social and commercial vitality created by the theater was sustained within the urban space (Kenanlı, 2009).

On a social and behavioral level, the replacement of traditional open air performances with enclosed buildings played a disciplining role on the audience. The local population, accustomed to direct interaction with performers and flexible movement within the space during traditional "orta oyunu" and "meddah" performances, was confronted with new rules such as fixed seating arrangements and silence imposed by the theaters. It is known that the local audience struggled to adapt to this indoor etiquette and that security issues occasionally arose during performances. This situation compelled government authorities and theater operators to issue regulations containing strict rules to ensure discipline within the venues (Aykaç, 2022).

Although plays performed in foreign languages initially faced a language barrier, they facilitated the local audience's familiarity with Western culture. This interaction encouraged local intellectuals to produce their own theatrical works and paved the way for the creation of 'Şair Evlenmesi' (The Poet's Wedding), written by İbrahim Şinasi in 1860, which is considered the first written play in Turkish literature (Cezar, 1991).

Furthermore, performance venues became spaces where gender roles were reexamined in the public sphere. While women's participation in public entertainment was limited within a conservative social structure, the latticed boxes in theater buildings and matinee performances reserved exclusively for women provided a mediating and protected architectural solution for including

women as audience members in the public sphere. The boundaries imposed by these structures, ultimately combined with the strict auditorium discipline enforced by Muhsin Ertuğrul and his colleagues during the Republican era, evolved into a powerful tool for cultural education that transformed the audience into modern, rule abiding urban citizens (Aykaç, 2022).

The performance venues that emerged in Beyoğlu during the Late Ottoman Period were not merely imported architectural styles or performance spaces. Located in Pera, a district distinguished by its cosmopolitan demographic structure and European lifestyle, these buildings turned this part of the city into a major center of modern cultural consumption and urban modernization (Gürbüz et al., 2019).

1.4.1. Reconfiguring Beyoğlu (Pera): The spatial, social and urban roles of Theater buildings in Late Ottoman

Modernization movements in the Ottoman Empire transformed not only the state's administrative structure but also its architecture and social practices. One of the areas where this transformation was most clearly observed was the spatial reorganization of traditional performing and spectator arts. Plays, which for centuries had been performed in open spaces, recreational areas, and coffeehouses, were moved to Italian style theater buildings beginning in the 19th century. This shift in performance venues also led to a geographical shift in the urban texture; Traditional performance venues, which had been concentrated in inner city districts such as Kâğıthane, Direklerarası, and Şehzadebaşı, gradually shifted toward the Beyoğlu district, where the Western and Levantine populations were settled (Gürbüz et al., 2019).

In 18th century Europe, the Industrial Revolution brought major technical and social changes. As a result, the Ottoman Empire strengthened its ties with Europe during its Westernization process. As trade with the West grew, Galata and Pera became key neighborhoods where many non Muslim residents settled. Pera stood out as a unique and independent area, offering imported European goods alongside hotels and entertainment spaces tailored to European culture (Yavuzarslan, 2022).

The climate of economic security that the region offered thanks to the capitulations made Beyoğlu an attractive hub for foreign capital and the Levantines; indeed, in French sources of the period, the region was described as a safer investment area than even the French colonies. An examination of early cartographic works (Kauffer, Hellert, Davies, and Moltke) also reveals that, until the mid 18th century, the cosmopolitan population was concentrated

within the walls of Galata; however, with the waves of migration that occurred in the 19th century, the non Muslim population rapidly shifted to the area between Tünel and Galatasaray and became concentrated there (Cezar, 1991).

This economic and spatial development laid the groundwork for the region's unique sociodemographic and cultural structure, which was the primary reason for the concentration of modern theaters and performance venues in Beyoğlu during the 19th century. Beyoğlu was a district where Levantines, members of European diplomatic missions, and Westernized Ottoman elites lived in large numbers, and where a Western style way of life was represented (Gürbüz et al., 2019). The Levantine and non Muslim populations residing in the area demanded Western art forms,such as opera and theater, which were an important part of their cultural customs, and built these venues through private initiatives. These social groups' close monitoring of cultural developments in Europe and their view of the performing arts as a means of prestige and social status triggered a proliferation of artistic activities and venues in the region (Özcan Coşkunsoy, 2019).

The performance venues in Beyoğlu were designed not merely as structures hosting a single artistic performance, but as multifunctional spaces that responded to the dynamic entertainment demands of the era. These buildings hosted not only classical theater and opera performances but also circus shows, concerts, balls, and early cinematographic screenings (Gürbüz et al., 2019). For example, the Naum Theater, located on Istiklal Avenue, was not only a prestigious music venue presenting European operas simultaneously with productions in Paris and London but also hosted diplomatic balls and receptions attended by the sultan and foreign ambassadors (Özcan Coşkunsoy, 2019). Similarly, the Concordia Theater, with both its winter indoor hall facing the street and its summer garden in the rear, became a multipurpose social hub serving a wide range of events, from light comedies to Istanbul's first cinematograph screenings (Evren, 2014). This functional flexibility has transformed the stages in Pera into vibrant hubs of urban circulation and social interaction.

2. Material and Method

This study is structured around two fundamental stages: a theoretical framework and an analytical reading of the image of the city conducted through historical maps (Huber Map (1887–1891) and the Charles Edouard Goad Insurance Map (1904–1906)).

In the theoretical stage, the evolution of traditional Ottoman spectacle culture, from open, adaptable spaces to the enclosed, bounded halls of modern theater buildings, is examined through literature, debating the social reflections of this spatial rupture.

In the analytical stage, a urban spatial analysis is employed to trace the concrete manifestations of this spatial and behavioral transformation within the urban image. Accordingly, the urban positioning and the images of theater buildings in the Beyoğlu (Pera) district are investigated by interpreting the Huber Map (1887–1891) and the Charles Edouard Goad Insurance Map (1904–1906), capturing the late Ottoman period. This urban layering revealed across the maps is systematically deciphered through the lens of Kevin Lynch's urban perception and legibility theory, structured around its five core elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Kevin Lynch and The Image of the City

Cities are not merely physical entities shaped by buildings; they are also social spaces that take root in people's memories, become imbued with meaning, and acquire an identity (Bayazıt, 2025). In his 1960 book 'The Image of the City', Kevin Lynch focused on how individuals perceive the cities they live in and how they map them in their minds (Özkök et al., 2016). According to Lynch, an individual's act of 'finding one's way' within the city occurs directly through the "environmental image", a mental representation of the external world, or through mental maps (Özkök et al., 2016). For the environmental image to be functional, it must consist of three fundamental components: identity, structure and meaning (Özbudak, 2018). Identity is what distinguishes an object from other objects and makes it unique. Structure refers to the spatial and formal relationship of the object to the observer and to other objects in the city. Meaning is what the image signifies to the observer, both practically and emotionally (Özbudak, 2018).

The readability and perceptibility of urban space depend on individuals' ability to easily internalize the patterns of form in their surroundings (Özkök et al., 2016).

The 5 Fundamental Elements That Shape the Urban Image: Kevin Lynch has categorized the urban elements that ensure the city's comprehensibility and legibility into five fundamental units of visual perception (Bayazıt, 2025).

Individuals construct the mental map of their surroundings based on these five elements:

1. Paths: These are the streets, sidewalks, transportation corridors, and railways that individuals frequently use while moving through the city (Özbudak, 2018). Serving as the primary reference for orientation, paths form the backbone of urban perception and the urban experience (Bayazıt, 2025).

2. Boundaries/Edges: These are perceptual or physical barriers that separate different urban areas from one another or frame the city and are generally not used by individuals as transportation (road) axes. Rivers, coastlines, walls, mountain ranges or railroad tracks are examples of boundary elements that shape urban perception (Bayazıt, 2025).

3. Districts: These are the city's medium or large scale, characteristic areas that are perceived in two dimensions (Özkök et al., 2016). Thanks to the common visual features or similar functions they contain, individuals mentally perceive that they are 'entering' or 'exiting' these areas (Özbudak, 2018).

4. Nodes: These are strategic areas that facilitate entry into the city, intersections where roads meet or diverge, and gathering centers where social interaction is concentrated (Özkök et al., 2016). Decision making points, such as squares or bus terminals, that individuals use as reference points for navigation are important areas where movement converges in the urban memory (Bayazıt, 2025).

5. Landmarks: These are point based reference objects that individuals generally do not enter but observe from the outside and can easily recognize. A city's iconic monument, a high mountain, a historic clock tower, or a distinctive mosque are elements of high symbolic value that help city dwellers navigate their mental maps (Özbudak, 2018).

The image of the city theory developed by Kevin Lynch not only breaks down the city into its physical components but also explains the psychological and social interactions people establish with space (Bayazıt, 2025). Cities where these five elements form a distinct, integrated, and meaningful structure leave strong images in people's memories, reinforcing a sense of belonging and ensuring that the city is "legible" (Özkök et al., 2016).

3.2. An Analysis of Theater Buildings in Beyoğlu (Pera) in the Context of Image of the City

In this section of the study, the theater buildings under examination are first analyzed in terms of their locations in Pera, and the significance of these structures for both Pera and its users is discussed within the context of the city's

image. Subsequently, using the maps by Huber (1887–1891) and Goad (1904–1906), the study examines the paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks created by the theater buildings in Beyoğlu (Pera) district.

3.2.1. The analysis of Theater Buildings in Beyoğlu (Pera)

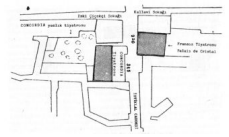
The French (Crystal) Theater is one of the first and most significant theater buildings in the Pera district. The building is located directly on Grand Pera Avenue. In this context, it and the Naum Theater stand out as two examples that face Grand Pera Avenue. It is noteworthy that Theater Street (Rue Theatro) is situated right on the corner of Grand Pera Avenue (Grande Rue de Pera), where the Naum Theater is located. This can be interpreted as an indication that the area was closely associated with theater in Istanbul during that period. Furthermore, the fact that these two structures, which are quite close to one another and represent Pera, were the first two theater buildings constructed underscores just how significant they were for the Pera district.

The Concordia Theater, which has an entrance from the Grande Rue de Pera but does not have a direct facade facing the street, is situated right in the center of a fairly large plot. Surrounded by buildings serving various functions, the structure is bounded by Douzio Alley.

Located on Rue de Petit Champs (Meşrutiyet Street), north of Büyük Pera Avenue, the building is situated within the Jardin Municipal des Petits Champs (Tepebaşı Municipal Garden). The presence of a theater within this city garden, built on a site that was once a cemetery, allows the structure to be used in both summer and winter and ensures its close integration into the city's public life. On the Huber (1887–1891) and Goad (1904–1906) maps, the street where the theater is located is also listed as Rue de Mezarlik (Cemetery Street). In this context, it is evident that the site is preserved as part of the city's image through both its former and current functions.

Ses 1885 Theater Pera Circus, a building located within the Halep Passage, does not face Büyük Pera Street but uses the Halep Passage as a linear thoroughfare; thus, it creates a gradual transitional threshold between the bustling public space and the controlled interior hall. The Odeon (Variety) Theater, situated parallel to the east of the Ses 1885 Theater Pera Circus, similarly does not face Büyük Pera Avenue but is clearly visible through its deep theater mass extending toward the inner courtyard and backstage. See Table 1 for the buildings and information examined in this study.

Table 1 Theater buildings Examined in Beyoğlu (Pera)

Building Photo	Building Name	Location	Const. Year	The Architect
	French (Crystal) Theater		1831	Giustiniani
	Naum Theater		1840	-
	Concordia Theater		1871	Ricci& Parmeggianni
	Tepebaşı Drama (Petit Champs) Theater		1874	Barborini
	Ses 1885 Theater Pera Circus		1885	Campanaki
	Odeon (Variety) Theater		1897	-

3.2.2. Interpreting theater buildings in the context of the image of the City

In this section of the study, theater buildings, a significant element of spectacular culture in Pera during the Late Ottoman Period, are analyzed in the context of the urban landscape using maps by Huber (1887–1891) and Goad (1904–1906). Accordingly, a 15 years period and the paths, edges, districts,

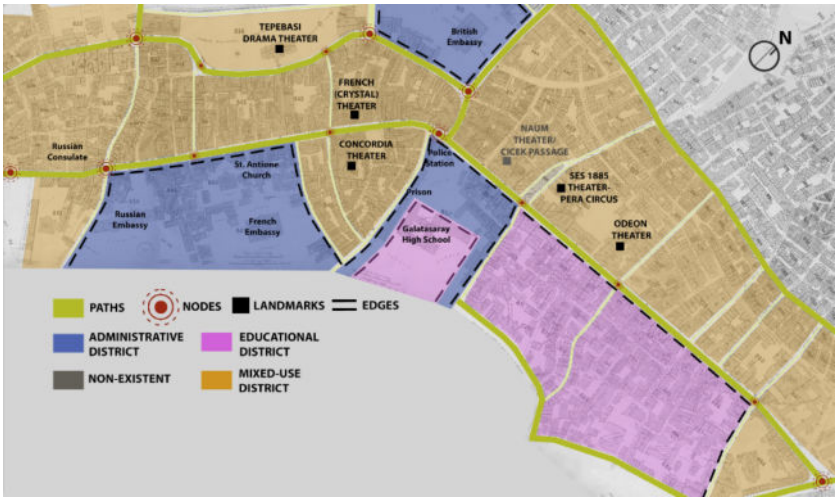


Figure 11 Insurance maps of Istanbul by Charles E. Goad (1904–1906) (Dağdelen, 2007). (The original maps were combined and processed by the authors.)

nodes, and landmarks formed by theater buildings are examined comparatively through these city maps.

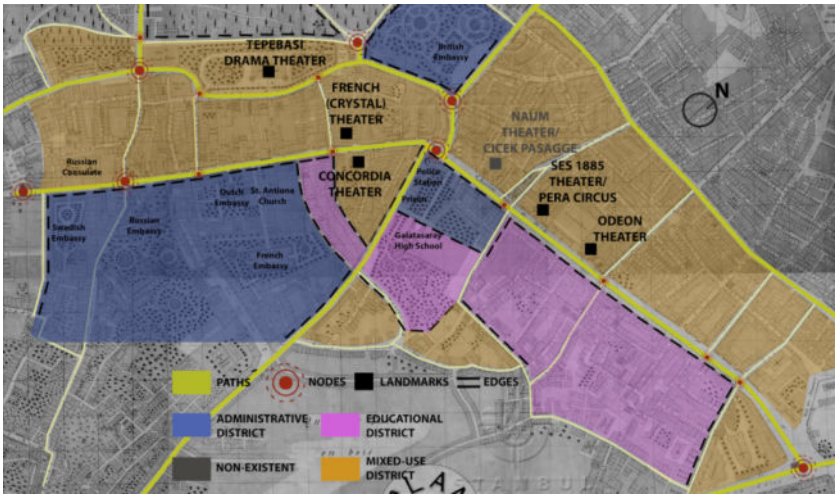


Figure 10 The map of Huber (1887–1891) (Atatürk Kitaplığı, n.d.). (The original maps were combined and processed by the authors.)

Not surprisingly, Pera, which served as the heart of social life for the Levantines during the late Ottoman period, was equipped with theater

buildings. In fact, the first theaters to be established, the French and Naum Theaters, are located on either side of the main intersection of Grand Pera Avenue. While the Concordia Theater's location reinforces this center point, the Naum, Ses 1885 and Odeon Theaters, through their positioning, form an axis that defines Grand Pera Avenue. With the exception of the Tepebaşı Drama Theater, the other theater buildings seem to have almost melted into Pera's mixed use areas, becoming part of this mixed system. Generally, these structures, which are not particularly extravagant or spectacular, are located at threshold points where many aspects of social life, such as transition, gathering, entertainment, and resting, take place. The Beyoğlu Pera district, with its dense and long established settlement, has not undergone significant change in either physical or functional terms within the context of these two maps. However, it is evident that the density of development in the area has increased over time. The district is seen to be predominantly focused on public and mixed use functions. When tracing the urban footprints of theater buildings, it becomes clear that these structures frame and define the main circulation route from Pera to Tepebaşı. The locations of these theater buildings also clearly demonstrate that entertainment and performance culture are at the heart of life in Pera.

In this context, if historical maps are evaluated in terms of the image of the city:

Paths

In both the maps by Huber (1887–1891) and Goad (1904–1906), it is evident that pedestrian circulation and cultural interaction took place along Grand Pera Avenue (Grande Rue de Pera) and the side streets connecting to it, within the axes defined by the theater buildings. The fact that performance venues were situated along the periphery of these routes demonstrates that, during the Late Ottoman period, the main transportation axis retained its role as the fundamental reference line shaping the city's entertainment life.

It can be said that the Grand Pera Avenue, which catered to nearly all the needs of the city and its residents, took shape amidst a highly dense urban texture during the Late Ottoman period. Pera's theater buildings were positioned precisely to support this axis. A look at the locations of the theater buildings reveals that most of them were situated at or near the intersections of Büyük Pera Avenue and the secondary axes connecting to it. In this context, the buildings shape the urban visual image that defines the road axes and circulation.

In addition to those accessible from the main avenue, theater buildings with entrances from side streets connecting to the avenue appear to have been

designed to ensure controlled access via narrow streets and passageways, not so much for visibility, grandeur, or display, but rather to provide the supervision and control required by enclosed theater buildings that emerged during the Late Ottoman Period.

For example, in structures such as Ses 1885 (Halep Passage) and Odéon (Elhamra Passage), enclosed passage corridors, which extend from the street to the auditorium located at the depth of the lot, function as vertical/linear internal pathways extending from the public street into the building.

Boundaries/Edges

In both the maps by Huber (1887–1891) and Goad (1904–1906), it is evident that pedestrian circulation and cultural interaction took place along Grand Pera Avenue (Grande Rue de Pera) and the side streets connecting to it, within the axes defined by the theater buildings. The fact that performance venues were situated along the periphery of these routes demonstrates that, during the Late Ottoman period, the main transportation axis retained its role as the fundamental reference line shaping the city's entertainment life.

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Districts

The boundaries on the maps have been drawn to define different functional groups. On both maps examined in this study, the urban area is divided into an 'Administrative District', an 'Educational District' and a 'Mixed Use District'

where theaters are concentrated. In this context, it is evident that theater buildings, which are closely linked to public spaces, are located within the mixed use zone. This situation can be interpreted as proof that theater buildings were at the very center of social life in the Late Ottoman period.

An examination of the maps by Huber and Goad reveals that theaters were clustered in specific areas (along the line between Galatasaray Square and Tunel) rather than existing as isolated structures. This area constitutes a dense cultural and entertainment district characterized by café chantants, passages, gazinos, and theaters.

A notable feature of the Pera district's layout is the proximity and interconnection of areas with distinct functions. For example, administrative buildings, religious structures and educational institutions are aligned along the same axis. On Grand Pera Avenue, which is densely built up, open spaces are primarily located south of the area containing administrative buildings and around the theater in the Tepebaşı District.

While Huber's (1887–1891) map depicts a relatively open settlement interwoven with embassy gardens and residences, Goad's (1904–1906) map reveals the maturation of an institutional modern entertainment district, characterized by large theater complexes, passages, and masonry apartment buildings, as a result of intensified parcelization during that period.

Nodes

The nodes marked with red circles on the maps are areas where main roads intersect and pedestrian traffic is heaviest.

The Tepebaşı district and the area around Galatasaray High School stand out as strategic gathering points where entry and exit to the Pera District occur and where social interaction is most intense. The fact that the first three theater buildings constructed in the Pera District, the French (Crystal) Theater, the Naum Theater and the Concordia Theater, completely encircle the intersection of these areas demonstrates that these structures define the focal point of the district. The Concordia Theater (now St. Antuan) and the French/Crystal Theater (now Elhamra Passage) transform this section of the street into a dense cultural focus point (*macro node*). The Ses 1885 Theater-Pera Circus and Odeon (Variety) Theater, built in subsequent years, are lined up along Grand Pera Avenue. These structures, in turn, are situated in locations that define sub-hubs.

The area where the Tepebaşı Drama Theater is located serves as a primary urban hub (*node*) situated on Meşrutiyet Street, a secondary street running parallel to the Grande Rue de Pera axis (Rue de la Petite Champs), which serves as a major urban focus point (*node*) and forms a triangulation with landmark

buildings such as the Pera Palace Hotel, the Bristol Hotel, and the Palazzo Corpi (U.S. Consulate).

Landmarks

The Tepebaşı Drama Theater, the French Theater, the Concordia Theater, the Naum Theater, the Odeon and the Ses 1885 Theater, with their western style facades and the cultural significance they embody, have transcended their status as mere physical structures to serve as monumental landmarks symbolizing the city's vision of modernization. The theater buildings, depicted as white squares on maps, stand out as the most important monumental *landmarks* that allow city dwellers to follow the entertainment axis in the Pera District. Their role extends beyond that of cultural venues to serve as orientational landmarks shaping the mental image of late Ottoman Istanbul.

The transformation of the *landmark* identified as "Pera Circus" on the Huber map (1887–1891) into a more permanent and monumental "Ses 1885 Theater" structure, through an architectural and functional evolution during the Goad map period (1904–1906), reflects the evolution of the city's landmarks over time.

The Tepebaşı Drama Theater, situated on a hillside overlooking the Golden Horn, forms a dominant landmark defining the entire Tepebaşı district with its freestanding, monumental structure integrated into the public park area.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

In conclusion, the late Ottoman transformation of spectacle venues was both an architectural evolution and a reflection of societal Westernization. Shifting from flexible, open-air settings to enclosed, proscenium arch auditoriums redefined physical and socio-spatial boundaries. Driven by imperial patronage and civic enterprise, this spatial typology introduced indoor discipline and renegotiated public gender roles. Beyond standing as monumental urban landmarks, these theaters transcended simple leisure functions, utilizing architectural form and spatial etiquette to educate and mold the modern urban citizen.

It is evident that the theater buildings in Pera during the Late Ottoman Period, documented in the maps by Huber (1887–1891) and Goad (1904–1906) that shaped Beyoğlu's urban *paths, nodes, boundaries/edges, districts,* and *landmarks*. While the early period structures (the French and Naum Theaters) faced directly onto the main thoroughfare, the Grande Rue de Péra, and stood out as dominant *nodes* in the urban landscape; while the later period

structures (Concordia, Ses 1885, Odeon) were set back into lot interiors, inner courtyards, and the depths of passageways, aligned along the axis defining the performance culture of the Late Ottoman period (*paths*). The transition from flexible wooden and open/summer structures, such as the Pera Circus and Concordia Garden, to masonry buildings integrated into passageways (Ses 1885 Theater) created gradual urban thresholds (passageways, foyers) between the free flow of the street and the disciplined interior of the auditorium (*boundaries/edges*).

An examination of the Huber (1887–1891) and Goad (1904–1906) maps reveals that, as parcelization increased, an institutionalized modern cultural and entertainment district emerged, packed with massive theater complexes, arcades, nightclubs, and masonry apartment buildings. This district is concentrated particularly along the axis between Galatasaray Square and Tunel. The Tepebaşı area and the vicinity of Galatasaray High School, where pedestrian traffic and activity converge, serve as strategic gathering points (*nodes*) that facilitate entry and exit to Pera and host the highest levels of social interaction. Theater buildings have become monumental landmarks symbolizing the city's vision of modernization through their Western style facades, architectural masses, and the cultural significance they embody. They serve as fundamental reference points that enable city dwellers to mentally trace the entertainment axis in the Pera district. In this context, the theater buildings located in Pera during the Late Ottoman Period, the paths that defined Pera's pedestrian circulation and orientation, the edges that separated the free spirited life of the street from the etiquette of the auditorium, the entertainment districts that reinforced the region's 'alafranga' identity, focus points (*nodes*) where social interaction intensified and monumental *landmarks* that helped city dwellers find their way in their mental map and symbolized modernization and that they became fundamental urban elements ensuring urban legibility.

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All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organisation or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

The article complies with national and international research and publication ethics.

Ethics Committee approval was not required for the study.

Author Contribution and Conflict of Interest Declaration Information

1st Author %60, 2nd Author %40 contributed to the article.

Bahar Kucuk Karakas: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Project administration, Writing –original draft, Review & editing; Elif Arslan: Visualisation, Writing –original draft.

There is no conflict of interest.

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence and AI-Enabled Technologies

I have not utilised artificial intelligence or AI-enabled technologies in this book chapter.

Alternatively, during the preparation of this book chapter, AI or AI-enabled technologies were utilised as auxiliary tools in areas such as *language editing and improvement.*

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