

The Impact of Public Spaces on Economic Development in the Ottoman Empire

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Abstract:

Public spaces, as important venues for citizens' daily life and social interactions, possess economic, social, and cultural functions. In the Ottoman Empire, public spaces included traditional Islamic architecture such as bazaars, mosques, and baths, as well as modern public spaces like coffeehouses, which gained global popularity. These venues not only served social and recreational purposes but also fostered economic linkages through their unique spatial layouts and consumption characteristics. Commercial information circulated within these public spaces, catalyzing economic activities. Moreover, public spaces played a crucial role in promoting commodity consumption, expanding employment opportunities, and increasing fiscal revenue, thereby having a profound impact on the empire's economic development. This study explores the economic functions of public spaces in the Ottoman Empire, providing insights into Ottoman public life. It investigates their roles in commodity circulation, commercial network construction, and market system operations, aiming to explore the interaction between public spaces and the economy.

Keywords:

Public Spaces, Ottoman Empire, Economic Development, Social Life

1. Introduction

The Ottoman Empire was a vast, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural empire spanning three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. Its society was composed of various ethnic groups, including Turks, Arabs, Greeks, and Kurds, with multiple religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism coexisting. This complex and diverse social structure created a unique cultural identity. To maintain national unity and social stability, the Ottoman Empire implemented the "Millet System," which categorized ethnic, religious, or racial groups into various millet (religious) communities. [1] Although this system allowed different ethnic and religious groups to maintain their traditions in relatively independent environments, they also needed to engage in trade and social activities in specific venues, leading to the demand for public spaces. Public spaces became an indispensable part of imperial social life, not only as open areas in the physical sense but also as important carriers of its economic, social, and cultural functions.

Public space has various interpretations in academic research, generally referring to open and shared venues in society for social, economic, cultural, or political activities. Jürgen Habermas proposed that the public sphere (or public domain) is an area between the state and society where the public can freely discuss public affairs and form public opinions. [2] From the perspective of urban studies, Kevin Lynch defined public spaces as open areas in cities accessible to the public, such as squares, streets, and parks, which are significant for the social life and identity of urban residents. [3] Sociologically, Ray Oldenburg introduced the concept of the “third space,” which refers to public spaces other than the home (first space) and workplace (second space), such as cafes, libraries, and markets, providing venues for social interaction. [4] In Chinese academia, scholars have explored the physical, social, and cultural functions of public spaces. Wu Liangyong emphasized that public spaces are not only physical areas but also carriers of a city’s history and cultural memory, an integral part of urban context. [5] Chen Zhu and Ye Min discussed the definition of public space from multiple perspectives, integrating Western academic research to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework. [6]

Public spaces in the Ottoman Empire included public venues such as baths, bazaars, and mosques, providing citizens with spaces for socializing, trading, and religious activities. Foreign scholars have extensively studied Ottoman public spaces such as coffeehouses, baths, and mosques, often focusing on these venues as individual research subjects, examining their architectural styles and functional diversity. [7,8] In contrast, domestic scholars have conducted relatively limited research on the empire’s public spaces. Some have mentioned places like coffeehouses and mosques in their studies but without systematic analysis. Li Ning, in “The Evolution and Reconstruction of Urban Culture in Istanbul (1856–1938),” discussed the rise and fall of coffeehouses and mosques, explaining their political and social functions. [9] This study will treat the public spaces of the Ottoman Empire as a whole, focusing on their role in trade activities and their impact on the imperial economy. It will examine how public spaces shaped the Ottoman Empire's trade network and their contribution to global economic connections.

2. The Historical Logic and Institutional Foundations of Public Space

The state is the macro carrier of social culture, the city is the micro representation of the state, and public space is an even more micro-level social and cultural unit within the city, serving as a tangible manifestation of social culture in daily life. As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire, the Ottoman Empire’s cities were key nodes for the transmission of economic, cultural, and religious activities. Public spaces were the core venues of civic life, facilitating communication and integration among different social classes and ethnic groups, and driving the development of the empire's economy, politics, and culture. Bazaars, bathhouses, coffeehouses, and mosques were the most frequented public places, providing not only spaces for social interaction but also serving as vivid representations of the empire's unique culture.

2.1. Historical Background of Public Space

Public spaces in the Ottoman Empire were not the result of accidental development, but rather the product of intertwined historical processes, religious beliefs, and political institutions. These spaces constituted a vital component of the imperial governance system and embodied the concrete expressions of social relations. They

not only fulfilled everyday functional needs but also served as foundational sites for economic interaction.

First, from a historical perspective, the Ottoman Empire inherited a multitude of civilizational traditions. In its early phases, urban forms were shaped by a combination of Islamic urban culture, Byzantine urban heritage, and Seljuk architectural conventions. In the Islamic world, early marketplaces were closely integrated with mosques, forming a core urban structure characterized by a fusion of religion and commerce. Byzantine plazas and civic spaces provided a spatial logic emphasizing organization and publicness. These diverse traditions were ultimately synthesized in the Ottoman urban environment.

Second, as a polity characterized by the unity of religion and state, the Ottoman institutional structure directly influenced spatial organization in service of political order. In this framework, mosques were not only places of worship but also manifestations of political authority, legal instruction, and social welfare. Units of public space often included religious schools, hospitals, bathhouses, and markets, reflecting a “centralized-radial” spatial logic that embodied the organic integration of social organization, economic administration, and religious authority in the Ottoman model.

Third, Ottoman urban space was marked by pronounced hierarchical features. Imperial regulation extended beyond the overall city layout to the symbolic meanings embedded in spatial configurations. Large-scale public complexes commissioned by the sultan—such as the Süleymaniye complex—served as powerful symbols of sovereign authority. These facilities were typically supported by the waqf system, ensuring a deep institutional embedding of space, finance, and governance.

Finally, in the practice of urban governance, public spaces functioned as crucial interfaces between state and society. On the one hand, they provided physical venues for citizens’ daily interactions, religious activities, and economic exchanges. On the other hand, they acted as platforms for social management, political communication, and the shaping of public opinion. The projection of authority through space rendered public space a key medium in legitimizing imperial rule. Thus, public spaces in the Ottoman Empire were far from isolated physical infrastructures; they were institutionalized constructs shaped by the convergence of religious, political, economic, and social forces.

2.2. Types of Public Spaces in the Ottoman Empire

2.2.1. Bazaar

The term “Bazaar” originates from Middle Persian and Armenian, meaning market or marketplace, consisting of small and large grid-like shops. Bazaars existed even before the Ottoman Empire and were an essential component of traditional Islamic cities, representing a heritage of Islamic culture. [10] Major bazaars were established in large cities such as Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir, and Aleppo. Each city’s bazaar had its unique characteristics depending on the goods sold. For example, the bazaar in Bursa was famous for its wool products. [11] From a structural perspective, bazaars can be categorized into four types: linear, radial, centralized, and cruciform. [11] The Grand Bazaar in Istanbul is a typical example of a centralized layout, consisting of multiple shopping streets located southeast of the Old Palace. [12] It continued to expand over time, becoming a commercial hub of the Ottoman Empire. Another similar example is

the Egyptian Bazaar, primarily dealing in medicinal herbs and spices, which was initially planned in 1560 and rebuilt with stone in 1609. [13] Bazaars were often situated near other public spaces such as mosques, bathhouses, and schools. The bazaar in Aleppo was centered around the Great Mosque and other mosques, located at the heart of the city, [11] making it a core area for commercial and social activities. In addition to marketplaces, the bazaar system gave rise to Khans and Caravanserais. These were primarily established to provide lodging for merchants and pilgrims, facilitate trade, and store goods.

2.2.2. Mosques

Mosques are another significant heritage of Islamic culture, serving not only as centers for Muslim worship, religious education, and spiritual solace but also as important venues for community activities, social services, cultural transmission, and political mobilization. They embody multiple functions—religious, social, and cultural. The mosques of the Ottoman Empire combined Islamic architectural traditions with Byzantine elements, forming a distinct Ottoman architectural style. Ottoman sultans were particularly enthusiastic about building mosques for three main reasons:

First, mosques were the centers of religious activities, but they also served educational, charitable, and social functions, contributing to the cultural development and quality of life of the populace.

Second, they demonstrated the sultans' piety toward Islam, consolidating their political authority, winning public support, and reinforcing the unity and legitimacy of the empire.

Third, they showcased the empire's strength and cultural sophistication.

The earliest mosque was built by the Prophet Muhammad himself in Kuba, near Medina. [14] Over time, numerous mosques of various sizes were established. The Ottomans inherited and developed the architectural style of early mosques. The empire's first mosque was located in Bursa and was built under the supervision of Orhan. [15] As the empire expanded, Mehmet II (Mehmet the Conqueror) converted the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople into a mosque after its conquest and subsequently constructed the Fatih Mosque ("The Conqueror's Mosque"). [15] According to historical records, Constantinople had 74 Sultan mosques, 1,985 Vizier mosques, 6,990 small village mosques, and another 6,665 mosques of various sizes. [16] With the continuous evolution of Ottoman architecture, mosque designs gradually matured. The famous Suleymaniye Mosque and the Blue Mosque are prime examples of Ottoman architecture in its mature period and remain popular tourist attractions today. The Suleymaniye Mosque, influenced by the Hagia Sophia, is an iconic masterpiece of Ottoman architecture, known for its grandeur. [17] The Blue Mosque, commissioned by Sultan Ahmed I, is a representative work of late Ottoman architecture, covered with blue tiles on more than three-quarters of its surface. [17] Mosques were often accompanied by bazaars, forming a "mosque-market coexistence" structure that organically integrated religious, economic, social, and cultural functions, promoting the prosperity and stability of the empire. [18]

2.2.3. Bathhouses

Ottoman bathhouses, known as Hammams, were places for citizens to cleanse their bodies and relax, with their bathing culture continuing to this day. The bathing culture

of the Ottoman Empire was rooted in both Byzantine and Islamic traditions, combining elements of Roman baths and Islamic ablution rituals, eventually developing a distinctive style. Ottoman bathhouses were generally divided into three sections:

Changing Room (Camekân): where visitors changed clothes.

Transition Room (Soğukluk): a cooler, intermediate space for gradual acclimatization.

Steam Room (Hararet): the main bathing area, providing steam and heat for bathing.

Most bathhouses had separate sections for men and women. In cases of a single bathhouse, alternating days were designated for men and women. Hammams were often located near mosques, bazaars, and residential areas, playing a critical role not only in providing bathing facilities but also in allowing worshippers to perform the major ablution (ghusl) required before prayers. Beyond their hygienic function, hammams were also venues for socializing and ritual activities. [19] Similar to mosques, Ottoman bathhouses held significant historical and artistic value. For instance, the Mahmud Pasha Hammam was renowned for its grand architecture and exquisite decoration. Its entrance inscription portrayed the beauty of the bathhouse with imagery of paradise and used the symbolism of the rivers of Eden to emphasize the presence of flowing water within the bathhouse, creating a tranquil atmosphere. [20] By the late 19th century, with the introduction of modern bathrooms, the popularity of Turkish bathhouses began to decline. Nevertheless, the unique bathhouse culture not only reflected Ottoman society's emphasis on cleanliness and ritual but also highlighted the importance of public space in urban life, revealing the empire's distinctive understanding of space, ritual, and social relationships.

2.2.4. Coffeehouses

Today, coffee is an indispensable part of modern life, and the ubiquitous coffeehouses have an inseparable connection with the Ottoman Empire. Before the 16th century, coffee was primarily popular in the Arab world. After Selim I conquered Egypt in 1517, coffee was introduced to Istanbul, becoming a favored beverage among the court and the upper class. From 1543 onwards, coffeehouses began to emerge in Istanbul, and by the 17th century, coffee spread to Europe through the Ottoman Empire.[21] In the early 19th century, there was one coffeehouse for every six to seven commercial shops, and Istanbul alone may have had as many as 2,500 coffeehouses.[22] These establishments served as venues for exchanging information, discussing current events, and sharing stories, where people from various social backgrounds engaged in intellectual exchange.

Coffeehouse culture was enriched by poetry, books, musical instruments, board games, and associated paraphernalia. The roles within a coffeehouse were also well-defined, including the barista, servants, performers, storytellers, and customers, each with their distinct qualities and roles. [7] Furthermore, coffeehouses were often closely associated with politics. The Ottoman government even imposed strict regulations on coffeehouses to prevent any potential threat to the stability of the empire. In 1840, as the Ottoman Empire faced the revolt of Muhammad Ali Pasha, coffeehouses became centers for spreading political news, expressing dissatisfaction, and discussing the fate of the state. People gathered there to exchange their fantasies about the Sultan, voice their distrust of the government, and share their anger towards the rebellion. [22] In the realm of political life, coffeehouses became spaces for public

opinion dissemination, community mobilization, and open discussion. Their cross-class interaction allowed political discussions to break through the confines of elite circles and permeate a broader social spectrum, playing a significant role in the empire's political life.

2.3. Institutional Foundations of Public Space: The Waqf System

The long-term stability and functioning of public spaces in the Ottoman Empire were underpinned by an economic mechanism endowed with both religious legitimacy and institutional continuity—namely, the waqf system. Originating from Islamic legal tradition, a waqf refers to the irrevocable endowment of private movable or immovable property for public or charitable purposes, with clearly defined uses and designated beneficiaries. [23] In Ottoman society, the waqf was highly institutionalized and widely employed in the construction and maintenance of public spaces such as mosques, schools, bathhouses, markets, roads, bridges, and water infrastructure. As such, the waqf served as a foundational institution ensuring the continuity and coherence of the Ottoman urban spatial order.

At the core of the waqf system lies its character as a form of “non-state publicness.” Donors (sultans, members of the royal family, local elites, or provincial notables) established waqf not only to fulfill religious obligations of charity but also to exercise influence over spatial resources and their redistribution. Waqfs generated steady income through the leasing of shops, agricultural lands, and urban properties. These revenues funded the maintenance and operation of public spaces, employee salaries, and social welfare expenditures, thereby creating an endogenous fiscal mechanism for spatial governance. From the 14th to the 17th centuries, the waqf system entered a golden age, both in scale and scope, surpassing the precedents set by the medieval Arab world. [23] While its origins reflected elite authority and wealth accumulation—often extracted from the lower strata of society—the waqf system paradoxically allowed for a degree of wealth redistribution and socio-spatial reinvestment, helping to stabilize imperial control at the local level.

Institutionally, the establishment and administration of waqfs were highly standardized and legally codified. Each waqf was registered with a religious court and accompanied by a waqfiyya (endowment charter), which meticulously recorded the nature and location of the assets, rules for revenue distribution, and administrative arrangements. [24] A designated supervisor oversaw waqf operations, subject to regular audits by qadis (Islamic judges). [24] This institutional design ensured the long-term use and protection of public spaces, shielding them from secular appropriation or speculative exploitation, and enabling a degree of autonomy amid political transitions and fiscal crises.

The waqf system enabled the provision of urban services and spatial governance without direct state intervention. It also allowed local elites to gain social prestige and moral legitimacy through spatial endowments. In this way, waqf institutions helped forge a durable interface between state and society. Religious endowments not only facilitated the construction of new religious and charitable complexes—often integrated with commercial infrastructures—but also offered a mechanism for materially reshaping urban space. [25] More broadly, the waqf became a principal instrument for reconfiguring the religious and social structures of cities across the Islamic world. Therefore, the waqf was not merely an expression of religious piety. It was a deeply embedded institutional mechanism through which wealth, space, and

power interacted. As such, it constituted the economic foundation of Ottoman public space and a crucial institutional support for spatial order and imperial legitimacy.

3. The Economic Role of Public Spaces

As venues for citizens' daily activities, bazaars, mosques, and bathhouses not only fulfilled religious, social, and cultural functions but also played an undeniable economic role. These public spaces were inherently sites of commercial activity, operating as places of consumption in daily life. Traditional Ottoman architecture, with bazaars, mosques, and bathhouses located in close proximity, created economic synergies. These spaces became hubs where most residents gathered for socializing and conducting trade. The high density of social interaction in these areas fostered a vibrant local economy, transforming these public spaces into dynamic centers of commerce and economic exchange.

3.1. Spaces of Consumption: The Basic Attributes of Public Space

Space is not only a physical entity but also a carrier of social activities, encompassing economic activities, consumption, and commercial behavior. [26] Public spaces such as bazaars, bathhouses, and coffeehouses in the Ottoman Empire naturally hosted daily consumption and trade activities, reflecting their inherent consumption-related characteristics. Bazaars were venues where citizens engaged in the buying and selling of goods, offering a wide variety of consumer choices. Their flourishing market economies and active consumption behaviors also facilitated trade development. Different bazaars had different commercial focuses: Istanbul's Spice Bazaar specialized in food trade, while the Grand Bazaar focused on furniture, jewelry, and similar items. Along the main street connecting these two markets, a third type of open-air shop emerged, mainly selling clothing and miscellaneous goods. [27] The prosperity of these two types of bazaars created an economic ripple effect, stimulating consumption and trade in the surrounding streets.

The first major space in a Turkish bathhouse — the changing room — served as a place for undressing/dressing, resting, socializing, and eating. [28] This multifunctional area encouraged patrons to linger and engage in conversations, during which they might purchase food, beverages, or additional services such as massage and grooming, thereby increasing consumption. Bathhouses typically employed a bath attendant (tellâk), responsible for washing, scrubbing, massaging, and even shaving customers. Medium or large bathhouses also hired additional staff, including a chief bathmaster (ser-nevbet), who oversaw all attendants; personal servants (nâtır), who provided various minor services to patrons; launderers (çâmeşuy), responsible for washing towels; and coffee servers (kahveci), who provided coffee to customers. [29] This spatial and personnel arrangement enhanced the overall commercial value of the bathhouse, transforming it into a space not just for bathing but also for social interaction and leisure consumption.

Public spaces in the empire played a significant role in economic consumption. They served as venues for commodity exchange and service consumption, as well as important links between the market system and social networks.

3.2. Coordinated Layout: The Economic Synergy of Public Spaces

In the traditional layout of Islamic cities, public spaces such as mosques, bathhouses, and bazaars often coexisted within the same area. Each fulfilled distinct

religious, social, and economic functions, yet they were spatially and economically intertwined, collectively shaping a vibrant urban environment. Every time the Ottomans took control of a city, they would establish a marketplace adjacent to a mosque. [30] As shown in Figure 1, mosques and bathhouses were arranged around the Grand Bazaar, and caravanserais (inns for merchants) were also located nearby.

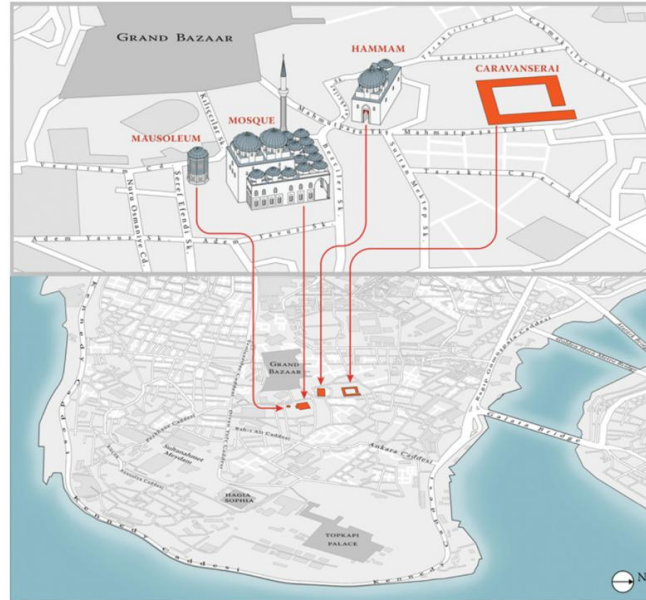


Figure 1. *Oblique Map of the Mahmud Pasha Complex in Istanbul [20].*

Firstly, the Bathhouse and the Mosque. In Islam world, ritual purification is required before prayers, which includes Wudu (minor ablution) and Ghusl (major ablution). Wudu, performed before daily prayers, involves washing the hands, rinsing the mouth, washing the face, wiping the head, and washing the feet. Ghusl, a full-body purification, is necessary in specific circumstances such as after marital relations or menstruation. This ritual cleansing is essential before prayer to ensure bodily cleanliness and show respect to Allah. The earliest hammams carried religious significance, being attached to mosques to facilitate pre-prayer purification for Muslims. [28] This is why bathhouses were often built adjacent to mosques.

Secondly, the Mosque and the Bazaar. From an urban planning perspective, Ottoman cities were typically organized around mosques, with bazaars surrounding them—creating a structure of “mosque-market co-location”. [18] This layout allowed Muslims to conveniently engage in economic activities after prayers, promoting both urban prosperity and social cohesion. From the perspective of religious-economic unity, mosques symbolized sacred faith and spiritual pursuit, while the bazaars represented secular life and economic activities. Commerce in the markets was always guided and constrained by Islamic economic ethics, reflecting a deep integration between religion and everyday life. [31] Politically, in the Ottoman Empire where religion and state were unified, the mosque represented religious authority and the bazaar represented economic vitality; together, they embodied the empire's power structure and economic strength.

Finally, the Bathhouse and the Bazaar. Islamic architectural complexes often included mosques, bazaars, bathhouses, and madrasas (religious schools), forming multifunctional hubs. However, bathhouses and bazaars also appeared independently in “market-bathhouse co-location” settings. First, in mosque-bathhouse-bazaar complexes, bathhouses were built near markets to allow merchants and customers to

cleanse after business activities and prepare for prayer, reflecting Islam's emphasis on cleanliness. On Thursday evenings, people would visit the public bath, then go to the mosque on Friday, and shop for necessities in the market. [29] This sequence of activities and spatial layout not only served daily life but also created economic synergy that stimulated development. Second, in "market-bathhouse co-location," bathhouses were constructed near bazaars and caravanserais to serve merchants and the general public. [28] This design addressed travelers' needs for cleanliness after long journeys, further integrating commerce with community life.

3.3. Information Exchange: The Economic Catalytic Role of Public Spaces

One of the most prominent functions of public spaces is providing citizens with venues for social interaction, and such interactions inevitably involve the exchange and dissemination of information. In traditional Islamic cities, bazaars, bathhouses, and mosques were not only places for religious practice or daily life, but also served as early nodes of information exchange. The rapid circulation of information in these spaces facilitated the establishment of commercial and cooperative relationships, significantly impacting market supply and demand, technology dissemination, and foreign trade, thereby injecting continuous vitality into urban economic development.

As the core of commodity circulation, the bazaar was not merely a site for transactions, but also a platform for merchant collaboration and information sharing. It promoted the flow of goods and capital while strengthening the connections among market participants, thus becoming a vital channel for the flow of information and commercial innovation.

Bathhouses, as semi-public spaces, often exhibited characteristics of social equality by temporarily dissolving markers of social hierarchy. Neighbors or strangers could engage in conversations in an environment free from formal social constraints, making bathhouses important venues for spreading political news, social developments, and popular stories. [32] Merchants also frequently met in bathhouses, negotiating deals and exchanging commercial intelligence in an informal and relaxed setting, thereby forming a kind of "informal economic social network."

Coffeehouses further expanded this space for interaction. Their emergence created flexible channels for information dissemination and commercial coordination. Most coffeehouses were established near commercial centers, enhancing their role in business intelligence exchange. Tahtakale, one of the earliest districts to host coffeehouses, was also a hub for both local and international trade. By the 17th century, the number of coffeehouses in these areas increased rapidly. In 1624, the administrator of the Süleyman Ağa endowment petitioned the court for permission to construct a coffeehouse and a single-room apartment near the market. [33] The spatial proximity of coffeehouses to markets and caravanserais formed a foundation for commercial information flow; as social venues, they further enabled more flexible and dynamic modes of communication.

While the social function of bathhouses and coffeehouses has often been the focus of scholarly research—as spaces for conversation, relaxation, and public opinion—they also played a significant economic role. Their social nature created a unique network for economic information exchange. This interweaving of economic function and social interaction made public spaces indispensable nodes in the urban economic ecosystem of the Ottoman Empire.

3.4. Imperial Engine: The Economic Driving Force of Public Spaces

Public spaces functioned not only as sites of consumption, promoting commodity exchange and stimulating surrounding economic activity, but also provided substantial employment opportunities and served as significant sources of tax revenue for both local and central governments.

First, public spaces boosted commodity sales. During bathing, citizens required various products such as towels, hamam basins, bath sheets, wooden clogs specific to hamams, and beauty clay, among others. [32] Similarly, operating a coffeehouse necessitated the purchase of coffee beans; the increased demand for related items—coffee cups, syrups, pastries, etc.—stimulated the development of associated crafts and commerce, thus contributing to the broader imperial economy. This illustrates the economic ripple effect generated by commercial activities within public spaces.

Second, public spaces promoted employment. Take bathhouses as an example: their daily operations required bath attendants, porters, cleaners, and various support staff. According to mid-17th-century official records, the Bey Hamam located on İstiklal Avenue in Istanbul employed fourteen people, including five male bath attendants, three female attendants, one janitor, one stoker, and four porters. [32] This reflects an important reality: the existence of public spaces directly diversified local labor markets, created a wide array of job opportunities, fostered the growth of urban service sectors, and increased residents' sources of income.

Finally, public spaces generated tax revenue for the empire. The Ottoman bazaar was a crucial component of the empire's commercial and fiscal systems. Customs duties collected from commercial activities supported the imperial treasury and sustained economic growth. Following Islamic political principles, the Ottoman rulers actively supported merchants, making the bazaar a vital node for both national economy and urban prosperity. [34]

Public spaces played a key role in the economic development of the Ottoman Empire. They not only invigorated the market and created employment opportunities but also provided governments with stable tax revenues that funded public welfare and infrastructure projects. In this way, public spaces not only sustained the Ottoman economy but also facilitated the diversification and stability of its society.

4. Conclusions

Public spaces in the Ottoman Empire were vital components of social life. Bazaars, bathhouses, and mosques constituted core nodes of the urban economy. While serving religious, political, and cultural functions, they also played a crucial role in the empire's economic operations. From their basic role as places of consumption, these spaces fulfilled residents' needs for daily goods exchange and social interaction, thus forming a stable commercial ecosystem.

In the Ottoman Empire—and in broader Islamic urban contexts—public spaces were not isolated economic arenas, but rather collaboratively structured, forming an interwoven economic ecology. For example, Istanbul's Grand Bazaar was not only the epicenter of the empire's economic activities, but also organically integrated with mosques, hamams, madrasas, and other institutions, forming a comprehensive network of economic, religious, and social functions. This spatial configuration enhanced the efficiency of resource allocation and strengthened economic interconnectivity between regions.

In commercial processes, information exchange became a key catalyst for economic growth in public spaces. Merchants, artisans, scholars, religious figures, and administrators gathered in these venues—not only to conduct business transactions but also to share market intelligence, policy updates, and technical knowledge.

Beyond their local impacts, public spaces contributed to urban and regional prosperity, while also shaping the empire's overall economic structure. Through effective management and optimization of public spaces, the Ottoman administration was able to maintain control over economic activities, ensure market stability, and provide a sustained source of fiscal revenue. More importantly, these spaces supported sustainable economic growth, enabling the empire to maintain commercial vitality across its vast territory and secure a significant position in the global trade system.

It was precisely through the interaction and integration of these public spaces that the Ottoman economic system achieved long-term stability—serving as a foundational condition for imperial governance and the maintenance of social order.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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